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REBELLIOUS PROPHECIES

BY STEPHEN FUCHS

The Gond and Bhumia of Eastern Mandla
The Origin of Man and of his Culture

REBELLIOUS PROPHETS

*A Study of Messianic Movements
in Indian Religions*

STEPHEN FUCHS



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PREFACE

THIS study is a venture into an unexplored field so far as India is concerned. The literature on messianic movements in America, Africa and Oceania has grown apace in recent decades, but no study of the phenomenon as it has emerged in this country has till now been published in India. As the bibliography at the end of each chapter, or section of a chapter, indicates, a large number of such messianic movements have been reported and described, but their messianic character was not recognized by the authors of these reports.

In a study of this nature judgments and evaluations somewhat unpleasant to certain sects and movements are unavoidable. If some of these judgments and evaluations are adjudged incorrect or offensive the author of this study tenders his apologies in advance as a proof of his *bona fides*. As an extenuating circumstance he wishes to point out that messianic movements come into existence as a result of unsatisfactory conditions which thus give rise to tensions and generate clashes between communities. Hence occasional criticism of the political, social and religious situation in various parts of India was inevitable. Communal clashes are ugly happenings and especially so when they are motivated by religion. The present study describes clashes of this kind. These are facts and facts must be confronted boldly, if ameliorative measures are to be relevant and to bear fruit.

In writing this book the author has endeavoured to serve two purposes. In adding to the volume of information on messianic movements he hopes that he has aided anthropologists concerned with them in the task of their proper scientific analysis and interpretation. In uncovering hidden spiritual currents with strong religious and political potentialities capable of engendering communal friction at any time he hopes to have provided information of the highest practical significance. When *communal clashes erupt suddenly in India with almost volcanic fury* people are taken considerably aback. That is so because they were unaware of tensions boiling subterraneously in various areas. If this study helps to throw light on some aspects of these clashes it will have been well worth the trouble of writing it.

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STEPHEN FUCHS

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INTRODUCTION

FAITH in a Saviour or Messiah, who is expected to arise at the end of times, is found not only in all the great religions of antiquity, but in the religions of many primitive peoples also. This belief requires for its origin and growth, besides universally active psychological motives, some particular conditions based partly on given historical situations and partly on peculiar religious ideas of leading importance in these cultures. The common human desire for happiness and perfection, never satisfied by the realities of the existing world, appears first as a reflection into the distant past and then as the assumption of a Golden Age in the early days of mankind. The conviction that mankind or, more precisely, a particular tribe or people, has changed in the course of time from a state of perfect happiness and prosperity in the past to the unsatisfactory and unhappy present state suggests a basically pessimistic attitude of the human mind. This pessimistic outlook, however, assuming a deterioration of the world and of mankind, has not been able to wholly extinguish human hope for a return of the Golden Age. If a divine or semi-divine benefactor could create a paradise in the early days of mankind, it can be recreated, and the perfect human happiness lost long ago through human wickedness or stupidity, can be restored by the same benevolent superhuman agency or by another divine or semi-divine benefactor.

The mythology of primitive peoples as well as of the ancient high-civilizations gives us ample proof of such optimistic expectations. We find them among tribes, peoples and nations in many parts of the world, but especially in North and South America, Asia and Africa. The most striking examples of messianic belief are the heroes of the early American high-civilizations, such as Quetzalkoatl of the Aztecs, Itzamna and Kukulcan of the Mayas, and Viracocha of the Peruvians. A dazzling god-like hero arrives in a mysterious manner, bestows various wonderful gifts on the people, teaches them cultivation and other useful skills, gives them a new code of moral behaviour and with the promise of returning in a distant future, departs again to an unknown destination. He leaves behind him an ineradicable longing for his return.

Such ancient beliefs and expectations may be responsible for the fact that even in modern times Saviours' rise up in many parts of the world so that we are able to follow the events of their often marvellous life with historical accuracy. The frequent appearance of such Messiahs among primitive and backward peoples has often been attributed to specifically Christian messianic conceptions. It is true that the Christian Missions have now reached the ultimate boundaries of the earth and that there remain hardly any peoples and tribes who have not heard of Jesus, the *long expected Saviour and Messiah of the world*. Even if these peoples and races refused to accept the Christian religion they may have been influenced by the messianic hopes and expectations of the Christian Faith.

However there are other high religions with traditions of Messianism. In Islam, for instance the belief in Mohammed as God's prophet may in itself be potent enough to create messianic movements. This belief in Islam is mainly based on alleged prophecies of Mohammed regarding the advent of a *mujaddid* a restorer of the faith after a decline of religion. Beyond this the sectarian belief of the Shi'ahs in divinely-ordained religious leaders or Imams encouraged messianic hopes and many self-styled Imams claimed this dignity for themselves.

Hinduism also has its traditions of Messianism. In Vaishnavism the idea of a future saviour is intimately connected with the doctrine of the *avatars* or incarnations of god Vishnu. In fact it is believed that Vishnu incarnates himself whenever justice in the world is crushed by wicked men and evil triumphs. As there were in the past, so there will be innumerable *avatars* of Vishnu in the future. But the last and most important one is that of Kalki. His life and deeds are minutely described in various Hindu scriptures but expressly in the Kalki Purana. Kalki will be born as the son of a Brahmin. He will destroy all evil and all evil-doers in gigantic battles and holocausts. He will then perform the great horse-sacrifice (*ashvamedha*) and hand over the earth as a gift to the Brahmins. He will reinstate the old orders and then go to live in a lovely forest with the whole world in peace and happy security. The earth will produce liberally, people will be happy contented and prosperous. The kings will protect the earth in justice and all men will fulfil their duties as

traditions and myths, or inspiration from Christian, Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist beliefs — the origin of recent messianic movements seems to be conditioned by peculiar economic and social situations which cause severe mental tension and distress. Such situations are mainly the result of exposure to strong influence and overpowering interference by alien civilizations. Backward social groups in close and long contact with such civilizations, while unable to withstand their influence and interference, are on the other hand often averse to assimilation or to active adoption of the new ways of thinking and living forced upon them. The consequence is extreme mental disturbance which is the more severe if it is coupled as it usually is with economic exploitation and social and political oppression. Unable to continue their life in these distressing circumstances but equally unable to escape their present predicament, they find ultimately, often after repeated failures of flight or rebellion their last hope in a charismatic leader or saviour who is to lead them out of their intolerable situation — on to an earthly paradise or heaven by more or less supernatural and miraculous ways and means.

Such messianic movements have been reported from Oceania, America and from Africa. It is however only in the last few decades that the attention of anthropologists and students of comparative religion has been focussed on them. Today an extensive bibliography of such studies could be compiled. The best are by G. Hoeltker, M. Leenhardt, E. Andersson, B. Sundkler, K. Schlosser, G. Balandier, G. S. Slotkin, H. Deschamps, J. Eberhardt, K. Burridge, W. Wallis and P. Worsley. These authors however describe particular movements confined to certain areas or peoples. The first general study of all the messianic movements of the world was published as late as 1909 by G. Guariglia in his book *Prophetismus und Heilserwartungsbewegungen als Völkerkundliches und Religionsgeschichtliches Problem*¹ (Horn Wien). Recently W. E. Mühlmann² and V. Lanternari³ have published more general studies of the same problem.

¹ *Prophetism and Movements in Expectation of Salvation as a Problem for Anthropology and the Comparative History of Religion*

² W. E. Mühlmann *Chiliasmus und Nativismus — Studien zu einer Psychologie, Soziologie und historischen Kasuistik der Umsturzbewegungen*, Berlin 1961 (Chiliasmus and Nativism. Studies towards a Psychology, Sociology and Case History of Revolutions)

³ V. Lanternari *Les Mouvements religieux des peuples opprimés* Paris 1967

Messianic movements in India have so far received only scanty attention. Only a few papers have been published on this subject. They will be quoted in this book at appropriate places. The reason for the neglect of the Indian movements lies probably in the difficulty of getting at the sources that are buried away in journals and unpublished records inaccessible to most students of this subject. The present book attempts to fill this gap and to collect all the available evidence on messianic movements that have occurred in India among various peoples in the course of several centuries. The author does not claim to be able to give a complete account of all the messianic movements that ever happened in India. He admits that some movements which he describes are doubtful cases and display only some of the features which characterize messianic movements in the strict sense of the word. But these movements have been created by human beings and thus cannot easily be pressed into a definite scheme. The author hopes that the reviewers of his book may point out to him cases of genuine messianism which he has overlooked or perhaps misjudged in his study.

In a study of messianic movements in India the towering personalities of Mahatma Gandhi and (though at some distance) of Dr Ambedkar and Vinoba Bhave should probably be included. In more than one way they can be regarded as Saviours either of the Indian nation as a whole like Gandhi who is considered by many an incarnation (*avatar*) of Vishnu or of a large group of untouchables like Dr Ambedkar or of landless labourers like Vinoba Bhave. However so much has already been written about these national figures that they can be excluded from this study without doing them any injustice. Moreover to sum up their life and achievements in just a few pages would scarcely do justice to their national importance in Indian political and religious life.

Again political movements such as the Hindu Mahasabha (founded in 1907 in the Punjab) the Ram Rajya Party (founded by Karpatriji) the philosophy and activity of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (founded by K. B. Hedgewar of Nagpur in 1925) under a dynamic leader like Gururji Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar who succeeded the founder in 1940 and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam of Tamilnad (founded and led by E. V. Ramasami

Naicker and C. N. Annadurai) are movements, mainly Hindu, of a strongly messianic character, with one difference, however, that while the earlier or primitive messianic leaders believed that their objectives must be achieved by magic means, these astute modern politicians have come to realize that the best way to get what they are after is to use not the language of religion or magic, but that of political demands on a harassed administration. For this reason we cannot very well discuss them in this book.

A study of the messianic movements in India is interesting also for the reason that in India many such movements are caused or inspired not merely by the infiltration of western culture and by the *Christian religion in its various denominations*, but also by Hindu and Muslim cultures and religions in their different forms. Thus the modern general theories about messianic movements will have to be modified and cannot simply be restricted to the orbit of western culture and Christian religion as against native culture and religion.

REBELLIOUS PROPHETS

MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS

I MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS IN GENERAL

It is difficult, if not impossible, to give a precise definition of messianic movements. But it is possible to enumerate and describe certain characteristic features which, either together or at least in part, can be found active in these movements. The characteristic common features which in greater or lesser prominence appear in almost all these movements are (1) A society intensely dissatisfied with the social and economic conditions which it is forced to accept, (2) the existence in this society of emotional unrest with certain hysterical symptoms, (3) the appearance of a *charismatic leader*, (4) the demand of this leader for implicit faith and obedience from his followers, (5) the test of this unquestioned faith and obedience consisting either in a radical change of life (cessation of cultivation of land, change of occupation, etc.) or even the wholesale destruction of property (furniture, houses, livestock, etc.), (6) the rejection of established authority and call for rebellion against it, (7) the threat of severe punishment of opponents of, and traitors to, the movement (8) the remembrance of a 'Golden Age' in the distant past (9) 'Revivalism', i.e. a renewed interest in the traditional religion coming as a rule after a period of indifference or decline and accompanied with expressions of great emotional excitement, (10) 'Nativism', i.e. the attempt of a backward people to restore selected parts of its pristine culture and to reject certain alien elements adopted from foreign cultures, (11) 'Vitalism' i.e. the desire of the members in the movement for alien goods especially spiritual ones, from 'heaven', through magic or supernatural powers (12) 'Syncretism', i.e. the indiscriminate adoption of various cultural traits of a superior civilization by a backward people, (13) 'Eschatologism', i.e. the expectation of a world renewal through world wide catastrophic revolutions and upheavals (14) 'Millenarianism' or 'Chiliasm', i.e. the hope or expectation of a paradise on earth for a thousand years or some such long period of time

(1) *A society intensely dissatisfied with the social and economic conditions which it is forced to accept*

This is the result of a clash between two cultures one vastly superior and the other retarded. The members of the backward culture often live in very simple and primitive economic and social conditions with no incentive nor prospect for improvement relief or progress. In the past before the clash with the superior form of culture they were quite content with their lot and desired nothing better. They realized their backward condition only after seeing a class of people leading a life entirely above their own often radically different incomprehensible and unattainable for them by natural effort.

Such a clash of cultures took place nearly always in colonized countries which were economically underdeveloped highly isolated politically acephalous i.e. without centralized polity and on the whole in a state of passive acceptance of alien rule. In India prior to the advent of the European powers we do not speak of colonizers and the 'colonized' but the effect of high caste Hindu and Muslim rule on the low castes and aborigines was practically the same as in other countries colonized by Europeans.

The backward communities when confronted with the superior alien society became aware of their own abject poverty and began to feel the desire to alleviate it.

The emotional reactions of the backward and colonized communities are of jealousy and often enough hatred of the aliens who neither share the good things they possess as friends nor initiate them into the mysteries of their production or purchase.

Their intellectual problem is first to explain the aliens' success and secondly to find a way to achieve similar success. But the problem must be solved in terms of the experience of the backward societies.

They attribute the aliens' wealth to their religion or magic or their peculiar way of life they never think it could be due to hard work and an inventive mind. When consequently they adopt the foreigners' religion or ape their customs and way of life the results are disastrous. They break loose from their own culture and lose their mental bearings while at the same time they enter only very superficially into the mentality of the foreigners.

religion and culture. Moreover they are not accepted by the foreigners as equals. They thus lose their mental security and equilibrium and become a prey to insecurity and anxiety emotions which express themselves in hysterical symptoms. This leads us to the next point.

(2) *The existence in this society of emotional unrest with certain hysterical symptoms*

This emotional unrest is caused by a confusion in spiritual and social values. This confusion is the consequence of the influx of a new and dominating culture and of the rules and regulations enforced by this dominating power. These new ideas are not properly understood by the dominated subjects and often are contrary to their old beliefs and practices. This clash places them in a dilemma and makes it difficult for them to choose between the old and the new values. Should they for instance give up growing food for their families and seek employment as servants or labourers of the foreigners? Should they change their old methods of farming as the agricultural officers suggest? Or should they still continue to increase fertility by magic or religious means? Should they get married according to tribal law, or should they follow the laws of the new religion which they have adopted? Should they in case of murder take blood revenge or call in the police?

Intellectually bewildered and perplexed their culture in which their ethical values are imbedded partially disrupted by the impact of the alien culture yet desirous of the aliens' wealth the members of the subject culture attempt within the terms of their knowledge and based on their ancient traditions to grasp the modern techniques of making wealth.

But the aliens share neither the technique nor the wealth with their colonized subjects. The latter believe that this is deliberate and with their traditional ideas of a cooperative social system they consider this withholding to be profoundly immoral. The aliens on the other hand have different property concepts and regard the demands of the subject people as arrogant and unjust. Moreover they are often incapable of teaching their subjects the essentials of their culture because they do not understand their difficulties and their way of reasoning.

The same is true with regard to their ethical values. They are told that their ethical values and rules of behaviour are wrong, immoral, repulsive and ridiculous. Many of their actions in obedience to their ancient traditional ethics are punished, sometimes very severely, in the courts of law set up by the dominating culture. Blood revenge, head-hunting, human sacrifices, cannibalism, bride-capture, duels etc. fall under this heading.

Their tribal mythology — myths are primitive forms of explanatory theories for the events of nature — which have hitherto satisfied their naive curiosity about the origin of the world and of man and of human institutions, are ridiculed and judged to be foolish, inadequate and wrong.

This mental confusion and despair, often aggravated by economic oppression and social degradation, leads to mass hysterias which may express themselves in mental disturbances, acts of violence or suicides.

Similar conditions prevailed in India in pre colonial times. The Hindu high castes treated the backward classes as half human brutes or as untouchables while the Muslims regarded them as despicable 'infidels'. In this respect Hindus and Muslims scarcely differed from the haughty Anglo-Saxon administrative officials and army officers of the British colonial period.

To increase the confusion, Christian missionaries, on the other hand, insisted on equal rights for all, and condemned racial and social discrimination, so did the Muslim missionaries according to whom a convert acquired the right to humane treatment on entering the Muslim brotherhood. But there were a few successful sects, particularly the Vaishnavas who insisted on social equality and preached fraternity and abolition of caste.

The privileged position which the aliens claim for themselves as their heritage is thus exposed by the missionaries as unjustified usurpation, as criminal expropriation of a helpless people by the strong and dominating invaders. This awareness among the backward classes leads them to envy, hatred and injured resentment.

If in this perplexity and mental confusion a strong authoritarian leader arises who pretends to know all the answers and takes the lead, a messianic movement is generated.

(3) *The appearance of a charismatic leader*

The position of the leader starting and continuing a messianic movement requires careful investigation. Sometimes the ostensible leader is only a figurehead and not the real driving force behind a movement. There is a sort of Machiavelli like figure behind him who is the real — often purely — political force behind the prophet. Religion is used intentionally and deliberately in the service of politics.

In some cases it is the leader who inaugurates a movement, while in other cases a social group is responsible for the rise of a movement who then search for and find a leader. But it may also be that the movement is the result and outcome of the situation in which both leader and followers find themselves and which forces them to concerted action.

It may happen that when the founder of a movement is not very successful, or loses his life early in his career, a successor takes over and leads the movement to success and gains many adherents.

The leader of the movement is usually a member of the community in which the movement rises but sometimes he is an outsider who however, identifies himself completely with the aims of the people he is leading.

The inaugurator of a movement has often had an intimate knowledge of the community against which the movement is directed, he has either received his education from its members, or worked for them or lived with them for a shorter or longer period.

His messianic vocation is either the result of an inner conversion and conscious aversion from the alien oppressor or he has been rejected or slighted by him and the messianic movement is initiated in revenge. Leader and followers need not always have the same motives and aims.

Most of the self styled leaders are hardly educated and often they are seriously mistaken about the extent of their own powers and abilities and about the power of the community which they are going to oppose.

A typical feature in all these movements is the claim of the founders — whether men or women — to be recipients of divine

revelations regarding doctrines, ceremonies and policy. They possess the greatest self-confidence in their mission and are unshakable in their convictions and decisions.

Generally theirs was a youth spent in poverty and obscurity, sometimes they are sickly, often they suffer from nervous disturbance or disease. Some are epileptics.

Often they claim for themselves — and are granted by their followers — a sort of divine veneration. In India, Hindu Messiahs often claim to be incarnations of one or other of the powerful Hindu gods, Vishnu Krishna or even Durga. The Muslim Messiahs claim to be Mahdis, Imams or great saints of the Sufi Orders. A few others claim to be incarnations of God or of Christ on his second arrival as promised and foretold by Christ himself.

Most Messiahs claim to possess magic power, or the power to work miracles, they can heal the sick, make people invulnerable, turn bullets into water, multiply food, foretell the future, and the like.

Very impressive to perplexed and drifting minds is the authority and self assurance with which these self-styled leaders carry themselves. Guided by a divine inspiration, they inspire hope and confidence in their followers. They pretend to know the root and cause of the evils which beset the community and to know also the way out of the trouble. If success fails to follow their remedial intervention they have an explanation and excuse ready. Generous assurance is given that all obstacles will presently be removed. Success is always just round the corner. This hope is infused into all new disciples of the movement. It inspires those interested in the cause to exert themselves and in fact stimulates unexpected energies and abilities.

(4) The demand of this leader for implicit faith and obedience

In all messianic movements the leader demands implicit faith and obedience from his followers. This is an indispensable condition for admission into the brotherhood. This absolute obedience and devotion to the cause are demanded because the leader is convinced either of his superhuman dignity or of the divine guidance and inspiration which he receives. Opposition

to his utterances and decisions is consequently regarded as blasphemy. When the movement is successful, the leader often assumes royal dignity and rights. He behaves like a king and expects to be treated like one.

The recruitment of his followers is in most cases selective, at least at the beginning of the movement only such disciples join who are easily led and gladly obey. Later on, when the movement gathers impetus and becomes large, these early and most trusted followers advance into important positions for which they are grateful to the leader and which they repay by redoubled devotion and submission.

Naturally, not all the disciples and intimates of the leader are sincere. There may be a large degree of hypocrisy and sycophancy in this, but the retinue of adoring disciples and cringing followers increases the self-assurance and inflates the ego of the leader. No doubt, even the most self-confident leaders have their hours of doubt and depression, especially after disappointment or defeat, but the group of devoted followers is usually able to reassure the leader and to envelop him in an atmosphere of exaltation from which he rarely escapes to judge his true position realistically.

Although these leaders are anxious to gain many followers to their movements, almost invariably they make high claims and demand heavy sacrifices as an indispensable condition for admission into the brotherhood. The higher the price the candidates have to pay, the greater their subsequent devotion and the more absolute their submission to the cause of the leader.

In many instances the intimate disciples of such a leader are tempted into committing actions which bring them into collision with the established authority in the country, i. e. with the government of the dominating culture against which their movement is directed. They then see their only salvation in a victory for their movement. A failure of their agitation would probably land them in jail, even a worse fate may await them. Hence their extreme devotion to the cause and their utter submission to the leader to whom they transfer all responsibility for their own actions. He will, as they hope, take on himself all responsibility and blame if the movement ultimately should fail.

(5) *The test of this unquestioned faith and obedience consists either in a radical change of life or a wholesale destruction of property*

The leader advises methods by which his followers can achieve their revolutionary objectives. These methods are often radically different from their former ways of life.

For the inner circle of disciples the movement means a whole-time job. They must abandon their former way of life and devote all their time and energy to the movement. Since most of these individuals up to the time of joining the movement had an occupation by which they earned their livelihood, they are now forced to give this up and to take on the duties which the leader assigns to each of them.

For the great majority of followers this change of occupation may become a necessity only when the movement reaches the climax. At that moment all men have to be engaged in carrying out the task set before them. It is the aim proposed by the leader of the movement, which has caught their imagination and found their approval. In fact that was their motive in joining the movement. Now that the moment has come to attain the desired goal, all are called up for concerted action to realize it. This often means giving up the occupation by which followers had previously earned their livelihood for themselves and for their dependents.

Another motive for giving up their former occupation is the conviction that a new era is being inaugurated in which everything will be changed. To pursue one's old occupation is a sign that the follower does not really believe in the movement and doubts its success. The test, therefore, lies in giving up all independent resources and in relying completely and without reservations on the leader and on the group carrying on the movement.

It may also be that the pursuance of certain occupations is being made responsible for the decline of the whole community (in the case of the Chamars, for instance, the dealing in hides and leather-work). A ritually pure job must be pursued in place of the old polluting occupations.

If a certain messianic movement is connected, as it often is, with the belief in a coming Golden Age, or a Millennium, no labour or physical exertion would in future be required, nor would there

be any need to preserve and store food clothing etc. Everything would be provided in the coming age of plenty. Any individual effort and initiative would only be an expression of doubt in the leader and in his helpers. In the Golden Age soon to come better goods would be offered to the followers, why then keep the present inferior goods? It is a declaration of faith in the leader to renounce one's property before the Golden Age has really arrived and before the prophecy of the leader has been fulfilled.

On the other hand if the messianic movement contains the element of eschatologism or in other words if the followers of the movement believe that the change of things will come through a great catastrophe, there is in that case still no need for further exertion or provision for the future.

Sometimes the radical change of life for the followers even the wholesale destruction of property, livestock houses etc. is the outcome of their complete rootlessness and despair. They hope by turning everything upside down to regain their loss of balance and security and to get a hold on reality. This is often accompanied by an expression of intolerance and where non members refuse to join the movement they carry out the desperate act of destruction. Subconsciously they attribute a magic value to this act of despair any refusal to join in it means a weakening of the magic effect and is therefore strongly resented and severely punished.

(6) *Rejection of the established authority and call for rebellion against it*

From the outset any established and properly functioning authority or government will be against any violent change which brings disorder and confusion in its wake. Consequently it is opposed to messianic movements. But such a movement has been created just for the purpose of bringing about a change and forcing the self-established authority to abrogate its privileges and to hand over control and power. It even aims at a violent overthrow of the imposed domination.

Where the subject societies are weakly organized politically and without powerful chiefs or kings it is easy for a messianic movement to forge a new hierarchical system of its own which completely cuts across old ties and boundaries between peoples and thus channelizes their loyalty in a new direction.

In this way messianic movements easily become political.

Messianic movements, being in their very essence revolutionary, become provocative and dangerous to the established government if the leaders are strong and militant. The established government often reacts violently to such provocation and suppresses the movement with great severity. If this is done when the movement is still in its initial stage, and when the government succeeds in eliminating the ring-leaders, such a movement can be completely suppressed. But once the movement has gained momentum and spread over a wide area and attracted many followers, even the removal of the leader is abortive. New leaders rise in place of the old one, and often they are more violent and extreme, more efficient and more capable of leadership than their predecessor.

Not infrequently the religious leader of a messianic movement assumes the political role forced on him by circumstances or by his followers. He then more or less abandons his religious aims and aspirations. But it may also happen that another individual takes over from the religious leader, and pursues the political aims either in close cooperation with or even in complete supersession of the religious leader. Often there is an almost dynastic succession of messianic leaders, the father being the creator and inaugurator of the movement and aiming at a religious change, while the succeeding sons or adopted disciples later turn the religious movement into a political one.

Where the dominating culture which causes the confusion and despair in the inferior community is at the same time the established authority and government (often indeed a self-imposed authority which the subjects have never really accepted) opposition to the domination of the superior community appears also as rebellion against the established authority and government. A messianic movement, born out of the clash of two vastly different cultures and supported by the inner rejection and smouldering hatred of the subject community against its masters, is essentially a revolutionary movement. A religious revolution will in such a predicament always turn into a political revolution.

(7) *Threat of severe punishment of opponents of, and traitors to, the movement*

Opponents offend a God, or a representative of God, and reject

the inspirations of God. Moreover, opposition implies criticism of the justification of the cause. It is blasphemy and sacrilege.

The conviction is strong that corporate action is required and all must fall in line. The movement must be an action of the whole community, as it is for the salvation and benefit of the whole society.

If members of the community keep aloof they weaken the cause, endanger its success, bring on the disapproval and anger of the divine agency that decreed the movement. They also impair the magic effect of corporate action.

There is an innate intolerance in primitive society, and in heavily oppressed social groups because they are mainly ruled by public opinion which enforces the sanctions. Moreover, such communities cannot tolerate indiscipline nor afford to take liberties with tribal laws. This would endanger the survival of the whole group. Thus the sanctions are severe and must be strictly enforced. A messianic movement which is accepted and approved by the whole community enjoys therefore all the privileges of tribal action in the vital interest of the society. Non-cooperation and even more so, defection are crimes in the eyes of the community. The greater the movement and the more important the position of its leader, the more heinous the crime.

(B) *The remembrance of a Golden Age in the beginning of mankind*

Remembrance of a Golden Age or paradise in the earliest times of mankind is found among many peoples all over the world. It is almost universal. The descriptions of this Golden Age differ widely and they change with the cultural standards of the peoples relating such myths. But all describe it as a place of pure and unmixed happiness without suffering, without sorrow and death. Almost always the emphasis is on material and physical happiness combined with sensual pleasures, though spiritual and intellectual enjoyments are also mentioned. Moreover, it is always clearly stated that man in this Golden Age is good, innocent, a friend of God, and obedient to his commandments.

Almost all the myths about a Golden Age include the story of its tragic conclusion, either through human guilt or through

the seduction of man by an evil spirit, or by some unfortunate coincidence. Thus such myths explain satisfactorily the existence of pain and sorrow, suffering and death in the world.

The consequences of this loss of the 'Golden Age' are, however, not final. For in many of the myths the promise of a return of the 'Golden Age' in the fullness of time is held out to mankind.

It is exactly this 'Golden Age', or paradise, which the founder of the messianic movement wants to inaugurate. He usually makes a deep impression on his audience because this tradition is still very much alive in the community and his promises therefore do not sound unrealistic or unbelievable. The preacher usually promises an earthly paradise, with material benefits in abundance. His preaching is clothed in popular language, easily understood by his audience. He uses expressions which vividly appeal to the longing of the masses for happiness and for freedom from suffering and want. Poor and rootless people, the sick and needy are promised immediate relief.

Hatred against the superior community is incited by a description of the paradise as it existed in times previous to the arrival of the invaders. Loss of the paradise is often attributed to the invaders. In strong contrast to the Golden Age in the past stands the present age with all its misery, degradation and oppression. The blame for all this is put on the superior community. The messianic movement is meant to restore the Golden Age destroyed or filched from them by the invasion of the superior community.

(9) *Revivalism, i.e. a renewed interest in the traditional religion, coming as a rule, after a period of indifference or decline accompanied with expressions of great emotional excitement*

Revivalism is a result of calling back to mind the lost existence of a 'Golden Age'. It is often believed that the Golden Age will return if the conditions are restored of that life in which man lived in those happy days. Thus the revivalists try to reconstruct, as related in the myths, the times and conditions of life in the Golden Age.

This results in a renewed interest in the traditional religion as also in the whole culture of the community. It leads to a

practice of the religious rites and even to the restoration of obsolete social and cultural institutions

The old religious cults especially are repeated and with much wishful thinking the revivalists pretend that they have already the feeling of happiness. It is a dangerous false belief because it leads to a rather artificial excitement of the emotions and the creation of a happy feeling which does not have any foundation in reality. The situation has not really improved the revivalists only dream of it.

These rites of revivalism are often accompanied by para-psychological phenomena such as visions trances and ecstasies hysterical weeping glossolalia etc.

This revivalism comes after a period of indifference or decline of traditional religion and culture. The messianic leaders now attribute the present unhappy state of the community to this neglect of traditional religion and to the abandonment of its practice. They therefore insist on the faithful performance of these rites with renewed vigour. This leads not seldom to an emotional excitement with hysterical symptoms. Frequently in these ceremonies decorum is offended and the excitement may lead to sexual licence and debauchery.

(10) *Nativism, i.e. the conscious attempt of a backward people to restore selected aspects of its pristine culture and to reject all elements previously adopted from foreign cultures*

A messianic movement accompanied as it usually is by a rebellious attitude of its members against foreign overlordship is not solely prompted by the resentment of a certain class in the community such as chiefs and medicine men whose vested interests had been most affected. It arises chiefly out of the deep reaching changes which the new way of life had been bringing into the rhythm of daily life with inevitable but unwanted obligations that it laid upon individuals.

This led to the conviction that they were happy, powerful and of strong vitality, before they had ever heard of the disturbing newcomers and before they had been tempted by them to abandon their old ways of life their religion and their social habits. The logical conclusion out of this is the belief that a

return to pristine habits of thinking, believing and living will restore their lost paradise and wipe out the nightmare of present misery. This thought finally leads to a deliberate rejection of all that is new and to an exaggerated evaluation of the old values.

The messianic movement is consequently often strongly grounded in the indigenous culture. For example, all leaders of the movement claim some sort of contact with the spirit world or the gods, or ancestors, or culture heroes etc. of the community. They claim to have received their vocation and mission from these divine or semi-divine patrons and protectors of the community and they pretend to derive their authority from them. Thus the means and rites by which they try to placate the gods and spirits of their old religion and by which they hope to regain their goodwill are often magical. Supernatural techniques are employed, such as prophecy, divine possession and exorcism of evil spirits. On the other hand, adoptions from alien cultures are discredited and discarded as polluting and harmful and making the old gods angry and jealous.

(11) *Vitalism, i.e. the desire of the members in the movement for alien goods especially spiritual ones, from heaven, through magic or supernatural powers*

The leaders of messianic movements become quickly aware that their resources for a campaign against their alien and vastly superior masters are pitifully inadequate and insufficient. Thus they try to provide quick and easy solutions of all their problems through magic and supernatural means. When these means fail to achieve their object (as they invariably do) the effect on the adherents of the movement is usually complete demoralization, passive resignation and despair.

(12) *Syncretism i.e. the indiscriminate adoption of various cultural traits of the superior culture by a backward people*

In spite of all nativism (i.e. return to the traditional culture and the weeding-out and condemnation of all alien culture traits) there is a large amount of indiscriminate borrowing of various elements from the dominating culture by a backward and subject people.

The leaders of a messianic movement attribute the economic and social superiority of their masters to their religion. They believe that certain elements in their religion are responsible for their superiority, consequently they adopt them and graft them on to their old beliefs and practices.

Social considerations also come into play here. It is believed that borrowings from the dominating culture will raise the status of the subordinate community. Through the adoption of these traits they will be able to put themselves on an equal footing with their masters and reduce the extent of subordination under which they suffer.

Concomitantly with the introduction of such new elements the leaders stress the necessity of abandoning certain old ways, which do not go well with the innovations. Since these leaders, uneducated as they are, usually fail to understand the true nature of the salient features in the alien superior culture, and hit on very unessential, though perhaps superficially striking culture traits, their new cult doctrine is hopelessly illogical, contradictory and greatly over-simplified.

(13) *Eschatologism, i.e. the expectation of a world renewal and improvement after a world-wide catastrophic revolution and upheaval*

Eschatologism is based on the largely mystical belief that things can only improve after they have become really and extremely bad.

Moreover, the inner unrest and insecurity of the mind is transferred to nature, and a natural cataclysm is expected because it takes place in the mind of the leaders of a movement.

Hidden in this expectation of a general upheaval and wholesale destruction is the hope that in such an event the social and economic positions would change, the superior community would lose its dominating position and the backward society would come out on top, without much personal effort

(14) *Millenarianism, or Chiliasm, i.e. the hope or expectation of a paradise on earth, lasting a thousand years or some indefinitely long period*

Millenarianism, or Chiliasm, is based on the belief in a Golden Age which is going to return or which can be restored in the fullness of time

the 'scheduled castes' have been much more 'Hinduized', though for certain ritually unclean habits and practices they are excluded by orthodox Hindus from participation in Hindu worship and social life.

These two categories constitute since immemorial times the under privileged populations of India. However, a few revolutionary movements of a messianic type can also be found among peoples who for one reason or another have suffered a temporary eclipse and have for some time experienced economic, social or political oppression.

While the Hindu (and Muslim) 'scheduled classes' are distributed in almost equal numerical strength all over India, the 'scheduled tribes' are found mainly in three areas: they are in greater concentration in the north eastern part of Central India, in Assam (including West Bengal), and in the hilly parts of South India. Western and northern India also have their contingent of primitive groups, but they are scattered in small communities and are, with the exception of the Bhils, almost completely detribalized under the influence of the overpowering Hindu and Muslim populations.

The most important and fairly compact group of primitive tribes is found in Central India. Indeed, in certain areas the primitives form the majority of the population. Here the tribes have preserved their tribal culture and tradition to a remarkable extent. Numbering over twelve million, they have so far successfully resisted any attempts at assimilation and detribalization though they were subjected for centuries to the domination and arrogant interference of Hindu and Muslim overlords. Needless to say most of the messianic movements in Central India have arisen among these tribes. Only one movement can be reported of a powerful untouchable caste (Chamars) in Central India.

The second largest group of aboriginals is found in Assam (including West Bengal) and the North East Frontier Agency. Until a few decades ago the tribes in the Frontier Agency enjoyed much freedom and suffered little disturbance in their traditional manner of living. Only since independence has the Indian Government earnestly attempted to introduce its administration into this frontier region of India and tried to integrate the tribes in the national Indian culture. The Nagas — as the tribes are

called in this part of India — resist vigorously and fight for complete independence or at least a partial autonomy. No messianic movements are reported from the Frontier Agency but they may arise in the near future. In Assam and West Bengal several such movements have arisen among the tribal people as well as among the low caste population. Some centuries ago when Vaishnavism was young and vigorous some of its apostles assumed a messianic role while spreading their gospel of human equality and the right of all to worship God in devotion and love. They were ready even to take up arms and to fight for their rights. In more recent times the leaders of messianic movements have come mainly from Muslim sects with strong reformative tendencies.

In northern India where today the tribals form a negligible minority, messianic movements were active among the Mohammedan and Sikh converts from the lower castes of Hinduism. In pre-British times such movements owed their origin often to Mahdavi conceptions, while later they began with reformative attempts of an allegedly adulterated Islamic or Sikh faith but in their later phases these movements turned invariably against the British colonizers who not only appeared to disturb their religious and cultural traditions but also restrained their political ambitions and imposed their rule and law upon them.

In western India in Maharashtra and Gujarat we find *messianic movements among the primitive Naikdas and Warlis*, the low caste Kolis and some stray Muslim groups under the influence of Mahdavi conceptions while the insurrection headed by Wasudeo Balwant Phadke is of a unique and extraordinary type. A number of Hindu reform movements can be reported to have taken place in the large and important Bhil tribe which here and there have developed into revival or even messianic movements. Their leaders were often outsiders not Bhils.

The primitive tribes of South India are divided into numerically small and insignificant groups they have been decimated and scattered and so completely subdued by the superior cultivating Hindu castes that they have lost all their fighting spirit. They are everywhere on the retreat. Their disappearance as tribal entities or their assimilation by the lowest strata of a classless Indian proletariat is only a question of time. Naturally few

messianic movements can be expected from the primitive tribes of South India

The situation is different with regard to the untouchable and backward Hindu castes of this region. They are much stronger in numbers and have preserved their caste solidarity in spite of their ages long oppression by the superior Hindu castes. Several times they have tried to assert their social and political position in South India *on the strength of their numbers and their ancient history*. Some castes of this category have preserved memories of former greatness and glory. Still so far only the low castes of Kanara could be stirred up by a great religious leader the Brahmin Bṛahma the second founder of the Lingayats. A more recent movement in South Kanara and North Coorg among the Gaudas failed to develop. In Kerala only the Ezhavas have produced leaders who claimed the charismatic role of saviour for their community.

A similar movement can be reported of the Nairs who though never low caste experienced a temporary setback of their social and political importance.

The lowest castes in South India like the Pulayas and Parayas in Kerala and the Madigas in Andhra are apparently still too much demoralized by centuries of severe economic exploitation and social degradation to stand up and fight for a place in the sun. A solitary Parayan leader styled himself Messiah but he was not able to create a movement strong enough to survive him long. The same is true of the Madiga Messiah Virabramham.

It goes without saying that the eventuality of the appearance of a Messiah or Saviour depends on a combination of numerous factors. The history of the messianic movements in India shows that in some cases it was the individual who gifted with the peculiar abilities required for such a role placed himself willingly at the helm of the movement and often provoked and inspired it. In other cases it was severe economic distress coupled with social degradation and political oppression that gave birth to it. The role of the Saviour or Messiah was assigned by the members of the community to an individual adjudged by public consent to possess the necessary qualities for such leadership. Sometimes the leaders thus chosen did not really possess the necessary

qualifications and sometimes even lacked the ambition to lead such movements. In this latter category of leadership are consequently found most of the failures of messianic movements.

MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS IN BIHAR

NEXT to Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, Bihar is the state with the greatest number of aboriginal inhabitants. In this region they form a more or less compact group. In their great majority the tribals are primitive cultivators who supplement their livelihood even today largely with the collection of jungle produce. In former times they also hunted wild animals for meat, but game animals have now almost completely disappeared in their areas.

Scarcity of land has forced them to abandon their traditional 'shifting cultivation' and to adopt plough cultivation. But in this type of cultivation they are backward and unskilled, and so their imperfect methods of cultivation require extensive lands and yield poor harvests. In the past waste land was available in abundance, but with the increase of the Indian population in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries land became scarce and large tracts of aboriginal land were acquired or usurped by Hindu and Muslim cultivators emigrating from the overpopulated river valleys and plains. The tribal people were slowly dispossessed of their fields and reduced in this struggle for land and living space to the status of tenants, field servants and even serfs of their Hindu and Muslim competitors.

Their economic situation was much aggravated by the frequent famines due to failure of the rains and the almost complete absence of importation of foodgrains from other districts. The British administration in those early days was incapable of adopting adequate measures in times of famine. Some relief work was entrusted rather haphazardly to the able-bodied, but the care for the aged and infirm was left to the community, as in ordinary times. Heavy mortality among the aged and infants was the result. The greatest sufferers were naturally the landless labourers.

Ruthless exploitation by landlords and usurers and administrative discrimination in favour of the superior cultivating castes added further to the economic distress and the social degradation.

of the primitive races in Bihar. To crown all, their national pride was deeply hurt by the deposition of their petty kings and chiefs in place of whom foreign and haughty officials now ruled and issued new and oppressive laws.

No wonder that in their desperate straits the tribals listened eagerly to the promises of men claiming to possess superhuman powers, assuring them of a speedy deliverance from slavery and a paradise on earth, without labour, misery and hunger, and the restoration of their ancient greatness and glory.

However, attempts at alleviation of their distressing life conditions came not only from among their own Hindu and Christian missionaries of various sects and denominations have for the last 150 years been active among the tribals and have tried to win them over to their respective faiths and to 'uplift' them economically and socially. The aims of their re-education naturally varied according to the ideals which these missionaries held. Christian missionaries differed much in this from Hindu missionaries. Both groups were able to attract large numbers of the tribals to their folds. But these mass conversions often led to an incomplete digestion of the new and alien ideas and habits of life, and this in turn often resulted in wholesale apostasies from the newly adopted faiths and cultural habits and in a deliberate return to the original culture and religion. Such purposive revivals of the old cults and habits of life again led to messianic movements here and there among the tribals.

1 MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS AMONG THE MUNDAS

The Mundas are an important aboriginal race in Chota Nagpur that is, in north-eastern Central India. They are primitive cultivators. By tradition land was formerly owned by the village communities, the individual families having only the usufruct of the fields which they actually cultivated. In course of time some Munda headmen rose to prominence and became petty kings. Other Munda communities became subject to Hindu (Rajput) rulers. The Munda chiefs adopted Hinduism because they wanted to be on a social par with the other chiefs and nobles of Chota Nagpur. Following the example of Hindu rulers the Munda rulers surrounded themselves with Hindu priests and

courtiers Through these men Hindu customs and beliefs found entrance into Munda society and culture

Now among Hindu rulers it was the custom, adopted likewise by the Munda chiefs, to reward their Hindu priests and officials with grants of whole villages and large tracts of land For in those times the king was to the Hindus the ultimate owner of all the land When such grants were made in the Munda tracts and all land was distributed among the Hindu officials, the Munda cultivators at first scarcely noticed the change from free ownership to tenancy as land was in abundance and taxes low But slowly the situation changed More and more outsiders invaded the Munda territory and the Hindu and Muslim land lords began gradually and systematically to tighten the control over their tenants and to reduce the independence of the Mundas to practical serfdom Tenancy rents were increased, forced labour and various other forms of economic exploitation were introduced Many Mundas were deprived of their ancestral lands since they had no title deeds and Hindu revenue officers did not understand the customary Munda landed property rights Moneylenders began their nefarious trade among the care free and improvident tribals and more cultivators lost their land to foreign invaders *Diku* (foreigner) became a hated by word among the Mundas

When the British took over the administration of the regions inhabited by the Mundas they adopted the revenue system of the Hindus and not that of the Mundas of which they were completely ignorant In order to increase the revenue and to tighten their administrative control they even granted in 1806 police powers to the landlords so that the Munda tenants were now wholly at the mercy of their Hindu and Muslim oppressors These could now carry on their oppression and exploitation without the least check Gradually the injustice increased beyond endurance The Mundas great lovers of independence but at the same time yielding by nature would have retired to new forests in quest of new fields and new homes as they had done on similar occasions in former times But now no virgin forests were left into which they could retreat

Thus conditions for the rise of messianic movements existed

indeed among the Mundas and this tribe was particularly responsive to such tendencies because it had a strong tradition of a divine saviour and culture hero who had once already saved them from the overbearing Asuras and taught them all kinds of arts and agriculture

(a) *The Myth of Sing Bonga*

Formerly there were people in heaven who served Sing Bonga. They absented themselves from work because on seeing their faces in a mirror, they found they were in God's image and therefore his equals. Thereupon God kicked them out of heaven and they fell into a place that goes by the name of *Terasi Pirih Elastbad*¹. They found here large quantities of iron ore and immediately made seven furnaces and commenced smelting. The fire from the furnaces burnt the trees and the grass and the smoke and the sparks ascended to heaven. This went on night and day. It disturbed Sing Bonga and he gave orders that if they worked all day they must stop all night and if they worked all night they must stop all day, but they would not obey.

Sing Bonga then sent two king crows and an owl to warn them but they did not take heed and tried to catch the birds and spoil their long tails with their furnace tongs. Then he sent a crow and a *lipi* (lark). Crows were formerly white but the Vulcans caught the crow sent by Sing Bonga and smoked it black and made the *lipi* red and flattened its head and still did not carry out the orders of Sing Bonga. Other messengers were sent with no better success than Sing Bonga resolved to go himself and he stopped at the house of Lutkum Haram and Lutkum Burhu, an old Munda couple who made charcoal and served them incognito for some time and amused himself by playing with the smelters' children. They played with balls of iron, he with eggs but the eggs smashed the iron balls. When the old man and his wife went to the woods to make charcoal they left Sing Bonga in charge of the hut and told him to watch the grain (*dhan*) laid out to dry but he played all the time and the fowls ate up the *dhan* except a few grains and when the old couple returned they mourned the loss of their dinner but Sing Bonga consoled them

¹ i.e. eighty-three terraced fields and eighty-one high fields.

the nineteenth century and were so much further aggravated by failure of crops and famine that the Mundas in their despair resorted to violence. They had no other choice than to fight openly for their ancient rights if they were not to be reduced to complete slavery which their oppressors obviously aimed at. The Mundas rebelled against their landlords seven times between 1789 and 1832 chiefly in 1811, 1819-20 and again in 1832. But the British administration was completely on the side of the Hindu and Muslim landlords and enforced law and order, as the colonial power understood it with its superior arms and well trained troops. The British East India Company then in power felt in duty bound to preserve peace in the new province which it had annexed though it was not yet able to administer it efficiently and humanely. Thus all uprisings brought the Mundas no relief. On the contrary they only aggravated their distressful situation. The pressure of the victorious landlords under the cover and protection of British administration became increasingly stifling.

In their plight the Mundas turned in great numbers especially after the Great Mutiny in 1857 to the Evangelical Lutheran Mission which had recently come from Germany to start its work in Chota Nagpur. The missionaries promised help. But the Mundas elated by the encouragement and sympathy of the European missionaries soon overstepped the limits of legal resistance and committed acts which were incompatible with law and order. The very existence of the Protestant Mission in Chota Nagpur would have been endangered if the missionaries had not ultimately dissociated themselves from the lawless and violent behaviour of the Mundas. These on the other hand felt themselves betrayed by the missionaries. Failing to receive adequate missionary support they apostatized in thousands and induced many others to sever all connections with Christianity.

The better educated among these apostates often trained by the missionaries now formed various groups and associations searching ways and means for achieving justice and redress. They presented a dangerous potential for rebellion. They only lacked a gifted leader to unite them and lead them into concerted action.

Their movement was called the *Sardari Larai* — the War of the Leaders. It resembled a pseudo-Christian sect but had

for objective the organizing of the Mundas into a revolutionary formation capable of expelling the hated landlords if necessary by force, and restoring full Munda domination over their home land. It is significant that the *sardars* were literate or had among them certain leaders who were literate, and were thus able to bring their grievances before the government by means of 'memorials' in which their difficulties and claims were competently explained.

The *sardars* claimed — without justification it seems — that the ancient forts and monuments found in ruins all over Chota Nagpur had been built by their ancestors. By these exploits their race had proved its great abilities. Their present plight was due to the invasion of ruthless and rapacious landlords, traders and usurers. These monuments also proved their ancient rights to the land and the crying injustice of expropriation. The *sardars* — like all Mundas — were passionately attached to the sacrificial groves and graveyards of their clans, as also to the fields which they had wrested with hard labour from the wild forests. They were very sensitive to their being degraded from the honourable position of free landholders to that of mere tenants.

The *Sardari larai* was on the whole well-organized and militant but it lacked a charismatic leader and consequently failed to unite the Mundas for an effective rebellion. Personal rivalries prevented the necessary unification of the Mundas. Just then Catholic missionaries entered the field and a young dynamic Belgian Jesuit, C. Lievens, started another mass conversion movement towards the Catholic faith in 1880, at the same time promising the aboriginals of Chota Nagpur his assistance in their land troubles. When he left India after only seven years, worn out prematurely, to die of consumption in his home country, and his successors curbed the too rapid expansion of his movement, disillusionment set in and many thousands left the Church, especially when their high expectations of regaining their ancestral lands were not realized. Again the *Sardars* were on the look-out for a charismatic leader who would save them from oppression and exploitation.

In 1890 at long last such a man was found. He was Birsā of the village Chalkad in Thama *thana* (police district). Between twenty and twenty-five years old, he possessed remarkably attractive features and was of more than average intelligence. He had

received some education having attended the Lutheran Mission School at Chaibassa for some time. Then he had for a while lived with a Hindu monk and later with a Vaishnava *sadhu*. Though Birsa finally reverted to his old Munda faith he had received various unforgettable inspirations from his Christian and Hindu teachers.

Birsa began his mission by spreading the rumour that God had appointed him to save his people and to deliver them from the slavery of the *diku* (foreigners). He claimed to have received his vocation when a flash of lightning struck him during a storm which instead of killing him illumined and transfigured his face. He had a witness for this event who never tired of describing this miracle to eager listeners.

Birsa soon found a large following and pilgrimages were started to the *Dharti Aba* (Father of the World) as he had himself called. He was credited with miraculous powers: he could multiply grain and cure diseases. Failures did not seem to weaken the confidence of his new disciples: they were attributed not to Birsa's lack of power but to want of faith and to the disobedience of the patients. Later Birsa claimed to be God Himself (*Bhaguan*) and threatened with death all those who did not believe in him. His followers indeed looked upon him as an incarnation of God to disobey whom would be a sin.

Birsa's teachings were a strange mixture of religion and politics. He propagated the Hindu ideals of ritual purity and asceticism while at the same time encouraging his disciples to defy the Government and disobey officials. He forbade the worship of idols and spirits which used to play such a prominent role in Munda religion. He taught that there was only one God to whom alone worship was due. This doctrine appealed to the Mundas because they had grown tired of the heavy expenses for the numerous sacrifices to the spirits advocated in their distress by their own priests. They had proved to be of no use.

Birsa had no definite ritual of worship but arranged prayer meetings much after the fashion of the Lutherans. He had attended them often while at school at Chaibassa. Thursday the weekday on which he was born was set aside for the worship of God. Work was forbidden on that day. Birsa's followers had to wear the sacred thread of the high caste Hindus. This appealed

strongly to the secret ambitions of the Mundas who aspired to the social status of the second Hindu caste the warriors (*Kshatriyas*)

Birsa conceived a code of morals which was modelled after the Ten Commandments. He preached that theft, deception, murder, drunkenness and polygamy were sinful though he exempted himself from the first command by keeping two wives. He ordained that pigs and fowls of a white colour were unclean and should be destroyed. This order was promptly carried out by all Mundas in the districts affected by the movement.

Birsa prophesied that a deluge would flood the whole country leaving only one dry spot — the top of the hill where he resided with his lieutenants. Fire and brimstone would rain from the sky, those who stayed with him would be saved, the rest would all perish. This catastrophe would soon take place, it was wasted labour therefore to weed the crops and as the people would have no further use for ploughing they should turn all cattle loose. Government money would turn into water so it was useless to keep it. They should spend all their money in buying new clothes, for when the great day of doom came the elect would have to be dressed in new garments. As a result of this teaching the Mundas in many villages stopped all cultivation, thousands of cattle were turned loose in the jungle where they got lost or were stolen. All cloth in the local markets was bought up so quickly that prices rose sharply. A vast number of people assembled on the appointed day on Birsa's hill and waited for hours for the events to take place as foretold by the prophet. When nothing happened the crowds were disappointed. When Birsa at last explained to them that the catastrophe had been postponed for a time they faced starvation for they had abandoned their fields and turned the cattle loose. How were they now going to live?

In order to restore the somewhat shaken confidence of his followers Birsa's teaching now gradually took a more political turn and became incendiary. Its ever repeated refrain was that the Mundas should rise against their oppressors, drive out or slay all foreigners — Hindus as well as Muslims and British — and establish a Munda reign with him as leader and ruler. Birsa announced that he would call fire from heaven to destroy the hated invaders of their country and that all Mundas who failed to join his movement would perish. He promised that the bullets

troops The manufacture of weapons—swords, bows and arrows—on a large scale was also organized Secret meetings were held in many places in the stealth of night at which Birsa used to recount to his audience their grievances till they burned with hatred against their exploiters who had humiliated them in such a callous manner for so long He exhorted them to fight for their rights and promised them the establishment of a *Munda raj*

When in one of the meetings some of the audience objected that bows and arrows were hardly fit weapons against the guns of the British troops Birsa reassured them and claimed that he could turn cannon balls and bullets to water by his magic and that he would make his followers invisible It seems that his disciples believed him Birsa also sprinkled his followers and future fighters liberally with so-called *bir-da* (hero-water) and assured them that now no enemies could conquer them

The open rising was finally fixed for the Christmas eve of 1897 Many Christian Mundas who had gathered at the mission centres and in their village chapels for the Christmas celebrations were attacked by Birsa's men and in some places their houses were burnt Police parties sent out to protect the Christians were repelled A few days later the Khunti police station was attacked by a body of three hundred rebel Mundas with bows and arrows battle-axes and spears One constable was killed and some houses burnt The Deputy Commissioner of Ranchi rushed with troops to the spot of rioting On the Dumari Hill, three miles from Saiko, he encountered the main body of the Munda forces about two thousand strong The rebels had erected stockades at intervals to defend their position They had with them their women and children and large stores of clothing, food and cooking utensils

But Birsa and his general Gaya were not at the stockade on Dumari Hill They were in hiding well behind the front line obviously ready to slip away quickly should their troops fail to hold the line against the Government force The verdict of history cannot absolve Birsa and his general Gaya of unredeemed cowardice Having excited the Mundas to fight they should have remained on the forefront as their leaders regardless of the consequences, instead of directing the fight from the back

The Deputy Commissioner first tried for an hour to persuade the Mundas to lay down their arms and to settle their grievances peacefully. It is not clear whether Birsa influenced the discussions or whether the rebels decided to fight in spite of his defection. They refused to listen to the Deputy Commissioner and went to the attack. However, against the superior weapons of the military force those of the Mundas were no match. Though they fought with great bravery, the rebels were easily defeated and in the encounter which took place on Dumari Hill two hundred Mundas are said to have lost their lives, among them some women and children. Fr J Hoffmann a Jesuit missionary and great friend of the Mundas estimated, however the number of persons killed as not more than twenty. P C Roy Chaudhury, the compiler of the new Singhbhum District Gazetteer, stated that only four of the insurgents were killed and nine wounded.

As soon as the Munda rebels realized that Birsa's promise of rendering the arms of the police innocuous had not been fulfilled they threw down their weapons and escaped into the jungle. Birsa and his lieutenant Gaya had run away much earlier. The police now started a regular hunt for them. But thanks to the loyalty of the Mundas Birsa and his closest assistants escaped arrest for two years in spite of the most vigilant search on the part of the police.

However they could not escape their fate forever. Gaya Munda was finally tracked down to his hiding place and shot dead when he resisted arrest. Birsa himself was at last found by some police spies and in February 1900 arrested with his two wives. He had been in hiding in one of his several jungle recesses deep in the northern hills of Singhbhum. He was again brought to the jail at Ranchi. While still under trial he had an attack of cholera to which he succumbed on 2 June 1900.

With Birsa's death died also the last hope of the Mundas ever to recover their lost rights and lands by force of arms. Still many Mundas refused to believe that Birsa was dead and they entertained the secret hope that one day he would return and lead them to final deliverance from all evils.

Even the religious sect which Birsa had started has survived until the present day. The followers of Birsa form an endogamous

group and abstain from flesh food and liquor. They worship no other gods besides the High God and do not propitiate the evil spirits. But their ranks are dwindling recently, as they find it difficult to find mates within their own community while marriage with outsiders brings on their excommunication. Moreover, the easy-going Mundas find it difficult to uphold the rather puritanical religious principles of Birsa.

There is however, no doubt that Birsa is still remembered by the Mundas. His exploits are a popular theme of the Munda folk songs and stories. Many boys are named after him in the Munda country. By some Indian nationalists Birsa is hailed as an early 'freedom fighter' and ardent Indian patriot. He was of course nothing of the kind. His agitation was confined to the Munda tribe, not even the other tribes of Chota Nagpur joined him in any appreciable numbers. And he had not only the expulsion of the British in mind but also that of the Hindu and Muslim landlords, merchants and money lenders, in short all the *diku* — the hated foreigners, whether British or Indian.

In spite of his undoubted qualities of leadership Birsa would not have been so successful in his agitation had the ground not been long prepared by smouldering discontent. Thus the Mundas readily responded to his exhortations for a rising. But Birsa's ambitions went much farther than those of the Mundas who only wanted to expel the landlords and to hold their land directly under Government. Birsa overrated his powers greatly when he believed that he could oust the British ruling in India and establish himself at the head of an independent Munda *raj*.

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2 MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS AMONG THE ORAONS

Another important tribe in Chota Nagpur is that of the Oraons.³ Unlike the Mundas they speak a Dravidian language akin to Kanarese, the Kurukh. Their social and economic situations have always been very similar to that of the Mundas with whom the Oraons live in close geographical contact. No wonder that messianic movements occurred also among the Oraons for Christian missionaries had been active among them since the middle of the nineteenth century and had spread the knowledge of a Messiah among them too. Many of those who refused to join a Christian Church accepted nevertheless with alacrity the promise of a deliverer from all oppression and misery.

Between the years 1895 and 1900 and again at the beginning of the First World War various prophets (*bhagats*) arose among the Oraons. It was the time when Birsa Bhagwan was active among the Mundas. The Oraon leaders and followers of the messianic movement called theirs the *Kurukh Dharm* or the real and original religion of the Kurukh or Oraons. What gave the new faith its initial impetus and appeal and helped at first to make it a phenomenal success, proved before long to be its greatest weakness and caused its final failure. It was the unfortunate combination of religion with material and political ambitions. The Oraon *bhagats* promised their followers not only deliverance from the bondage of capricious and bloodthirsty tribal spirits of which the Oraons were much afraid but at the same time relief from an oppressive and unjust revenue system and from exploitation by landlords, usurers and various government officials. In fact the great appeal of the new faith rested mainly on the promise held out by the propagators of the *Kurukh Dharm* that through devotion to *Bhagwan* the one true God they would be able to obtain relief from their long standing agrarian grievances and the prevailing misery of their economic condition. Moreover it was claimed by the propagators of the new faith that by its practice they would at the same time rise in social status above their Christian rivals and become equal with the Hindus who claimed social superiority and looked down on them with contempt. Here too consequently the religious aspect of the movement was

³ In 1931 the number amounted to 644,042.

intimately connected with social and economic interests. The leaders of the new movement were certainly indebted to the ideas of the Hindu Bhakti cults and to Christianity when they preached that their followers must begin their new life by abandoning the worship of the spirits which so far had played a most important role in their religion. They declared that in their past — in the Golden Age of the Oraons — they had worshipped *one God only* and that it was this worship which had made them so happy and free. It was due to the unfortunate influence of the Mundas that they had slowly adopted the worship of the spirits. And they believed that these very spirits were responsible for their present adverse social and economic condition. These spirits must not only be abandoned but positively expelled from the Oraon country. The *bhagats* invented a special ritual of exorcism for this purpose.

(a) *The Movement of Jatra Bhagat*

The person who first expressed in words these ideas that had been long fermenting in the minds of the Oraon race was a young man, Jatra by name. He was about twenty five years of age, a resident of the village Chingri or Chepri Nawatoli near Gumla. From his childhood he was of a contemplative turn of mind and wanted to become a religious leader in his village (*Ojha* or *Mati*). Everyday in the morning after taking his bath he used to meditate facing the sun.

In April 1914 he proclaimed to his fellow villagers that during his prayer he had beheld a luminous figure. It was the Supreme God Dharmes himself who had given him the order to spread his message of truth. He had expressed his wish that the Oraons should give up exorcism and worship of the spirits, that they should abjure all animal sacrifices, animal food and liquor, and that they should no more plough their fields with cows and bullocks because these sacred animals should not be yoked to the heavy plough. If they had no buffaloes to drag the plough they should give up ploughing altogether, for it failed to save the tribe from famine and poverty. The Oraons should revert to their ancient traditional form of cultivation, that is to say, to 'shifting cultivation', in which the jungle is burned down and the seed sown in the fertile ashes. Nor should Oraons work any longer as coolies and labourers for men of other castes and tribes.

Jatra further proclaimed that he had been ordered by Dharmes to gather together as many disciples as he could, teach them songs and incantations which came to him through divine inspiration and thereby to cure fever, sore eyes and other diseases. The devotional songs which Jatra Bhagat composed also speak of his great love for his home country and his intense hatred of things imported from abroad.

Jatra soon collected a following of one to two thousand Oraons. Like Birsa Bhagwan among the Mundas, he too proclaimed himself undisputed leader of all Oraons in matters temporal as well as spiritual, and warned those who did not join his movement that they would be struck dumb. Soon he also began to preach against the landlords, the missionaries and the British Government.

Now the new faith began to spread like wild fire. The police, who had been watching the movement with concern, found it necessary to step in. Jatra Bhagat was arrested with seven of his closest followers when he forbade his followers to accept work as coolies at the construction of a school in a village near Chepri Nawatoli. The magistrate who tried Jatra and his followers bound them over to keep the peace and then released them. Jatra Bhagat, who obviously was not built of heroic mould, got badly frightened and abandoned his preaching. He disappeared from the scene. His further fate is unknown.

But other *bhagats* took over from Jatra and continued the movement. One such leader was Sibū Bhagat of Mandar. Of him it is related that he had died and had even been buried, but that God had revived him and given him the express order to spread the message of truth in the world. People eagerly embraced him as they believed that he had met God. After he had secured some followers, Sibū sacrificed one day a black goat on the banks of the river Damodar and distributed the sacrificial meat to some of his followers. He told them that the mission of the Tana Bhagats had been accomplished and that they were now permitted to eat meat. Those who took the meat are now known as Julaha Bhagats while those who refused to eat meat and drink liquor assumed the name of Arwa Bhagats because they only eat Arwa rice.

Another similar leader was Balram Bhagat who laid great emphasis on the worship of the cow. His disciples are strictly

prohibited from yoking a cow or bullock to the plough. Consequently, they gave up cultivation altogether and became cattle herders. They now sell milk and milk products like butter and curd. They call themselves Gau Rakshini Bhagats.

(b) *The Devamama Movement*

Even Oraon women became leaders of such *bhagat* movements. Thus in the village Batkuri or Babhuri in Ranchu District an Oraon woman named Devamama became divinely inspired. One day she went to take her bath in the village tank. When she failed to come home her husband, after waiting anxious hours for her return, went to the tank and found her seated on the bank in a semi-conscious state of spiritual exaltation. She was all the time repeating the words 'Bom-Bom Bom' — the orthodox Hindu salutation for Mahadeo (god Shiva of the Hindus). The woman claimed that the deity had granted her a vision. She was taken home reverently. Soon afterwards she began to preach the new faith of *bhakti* (devotion) that had been revealed to her by the god Mahadeo. Her doctrine was substantially the same that had been taught by Jatra Bhagat. In her own village and in some of the neighbouring villages this woman was accepted as a prophetess.

(c) *The 'Tana' Bhagat Movement*

Quite a number of such local prophets arose among the Oraons professing more or less the same current ideas. About the latter part of the year 1915 these local reform movements began to converge into one large, powerful messianic movement which finally went under the name 'Tana Bhagat movement'. It spread practically over the whole of Chota Nagpur wherever Oraon villages were found. Members of other tribes, however, rarely joined this movement.

The message of this 'Tana Bhagat movement' — called *tano* or *tana* (to pull, or pulling) from the frequent use of this word in their hymns — was that God (whom they called Dharmes, the 'Just', or Bhagwan the 'Bountiful') would send a most powerful and benevolent delegate down to earth to redeem the Oraons from their miserable state. Sometimes this Messiah was identified

with Birsa, the Munda revolutionary of 1895, or with the German Kaiser Wilhelm II, or with other celebrities of the time. This messenger of God would teach them all that was necessary for them to know. Without any troublesome instruction in school the Oraons would learn in one day so much that they could pass their high-school examinations with flying colours. This delegate sent by God would lead them to victory, would expel all foreign settlers from their land (Hindu and Muslim, as well as British) and restore all their property to them. He would do this during a darkness lasting seven days and seven nights.

After the darkness a bright day would follow lasting equally long — seven days and seven nights. During this time the millennial era of the Oraon rule (*raj*) would be inaugurated. The divine messenger would preside over the new kingdom and bring heaven down to earth. A few grains of rice would suffice to prepare a sumptuous meal, and rich crops would grow in the fields without the necessity of tilling the soil or sowing and weeding. Others preached that in place of a mere messenger God Himself would come and dwell in the humble huts of the Oraons.

In order to prepare unhindered access to their houses for the 'Spirit from Above', many Oraons removed several rows of tiles from the roofs of their huts. Bhagwan was expected to descend from his heavenly abode to preside over their nightly meetings, and for the sake of writing down his sermons the *bhagats* bought many hundreds of slates in the shops and took them to their fields at night where they held their meetings.

One day the *bhagats* conceived the idea of regarding their usual cooking pots as unclean. They threw them all out of their houses — earthen pots, pans, wooden spoons and ladles. Brass vessels they buried under the hearth, they were to be kept hidden until the arrival of God or His messenger, who would then purify them. In some villages all the dogs were killed, because it was feared that the dogs might annoy God with their barking and thus prevent him from visiting their villages. Bullocks and cows were let loose, since ploughing and milking would soon be unnecessary in the coming era of plenty.

In order to speed the arrival of the great deliverer the Oraons had thus, according to the strict injunctions of the *bhagats*, to fulfil certain conditions which radically changed their old habits

of life. But above all they were requested to have a firm and blind faith in God and in His messenger. As the *bhagats* were obviously under the influence of Hindu reformers, they demanded from their Oraon disciples abstinence from meat and liquor. In addition, objects of a red colour — the colour of blood — were taboo to them; consequently, the Oraons were forbidden to eat their very popular red pepper, as well as tomatoes, and reddish rice. Moreover, all pigs and chickens had to be killed, since from then on the Oraons were denied their beloved pork and fowl's meat. The most difficult and unpopular taboo, however, was that the Oraons should give up dancing. This was their greatest sacrifice, for the Oraons were always passionately fond of singing and dancing.

Instead of their old, gay and frivolous songs and dances at night, the followers of the movement were in the evenings convoked by the *bhagats* for prayer and hymn singing. Often they prayed and sang throughout the night in order to expel the evil spirits and to liberate man, beast and home of their pernicious influence. It was indeed a weird sight to watch them singing vociferously, waving their long shawls in the air and swinging their spears, and stamping them on the ground in order to drive out the evil spirits. Frequently they worked themselves into such a frenzy that their bodies began to shake and tremble; they fell into convulsions, shrieking and generally behaving hysterically and like madmen.

When after several such meetings they were properly worked up, they frequently reverted to their old pastime of witch-hunting. It then appeared to them that all their praying and hymn singing would be futile unless they drove out the last evil spirit from the community. It frequently happened that in a meeting a man or woman in this frame of mind became hysterical, behaved oddly and confessed to being possessed by an evil spirit. The only way the Oraons knew of exorcizing the evil spirit was to beat it out, and this was literally resorted to each time. The poor man or woman who had become the object of their wrath was beaten with sticks, sometimes so severely that serious injury and even death resulted from the exorcism. Other acts of violence and occasional fits of insanity were consequences of these protracted hysterical meetings.

No wonder that this new cult gradually assumed perverse and dangerous forms and finally threatened to break out into open revolt against outsiders (*dilu*) and even against members of their own community who refused to join them. The brunt of hatred had to be borne by the Christians. Through the tactics of the *bhagats* the members of the new sect gained great self confidence, and in their desire for deliverance from economic exploitation and want they became a serious danger to their oppressors — the landlords and usurers traders and officials. Finally they even threatened the police and revenue officers who so far had encountered only passive acquiescence to their merciless exploitation. Many Christian converts, too, were affected by the movement and several thousands of them apostatized and joined the 'Tana Bhagat movement'

Soon the Oraons began to sharpen their old battle axes and spears and to prepare for an armed revolt and the forceful expulsion of their hated oppressors. The leaders of the movement convinced their gullible Oraon followers that their magic blessings would make them invulnerable and turn the bullets of the police into water.

The rumours about an impending rising of the Oraons caused great panic among the local landlords and government officials who neither understood the incessant nocturnal songs and incantations nor indeed were permitted to approach and witness the proceedings. When a number of Tanas also stopped payment of rents to their landlords and gave up ploughing their fields the government decided that the time had come to step in and stop the whole agitation.

No doubt not all alarmist reports were true which the police officials had received from panic stricken landlords and usurious money lenders with bad consciences who rightly feared the revenge of the long suffering Oraons. Especially dismayed were the liquor sellers whose business suffered much as a result of the vow of total abstinence from alcohol which the *bhagats* imposed on their Oraon followers.

But it could indeed be proved that some *bhagats* had added the name of 'German Baba' (Kaiser Wilhelm II) to their prayers and incantations. It was war time and in the days of the early German victories the British were very touchy, these prayers

sounded seditious and disloyal in the extreme. The British authorities accordingly prohibited the nightly gatherings and prosecuted several batches of *bhagats* who disobeyed the new regulations and threw them into prison.

By keeping the restless Oraons thus under strict supervision a general rising of this turbulent tribe could successfully be averted. When the Messenger of God failed to arrive and the exaggerated promises of the prophets proved to be illusory a large number of disciples began to waver and finally to break away from the movement. A great number of Oraons reverted to their old ways of life and began again to worship the spirits. Finally the whole movement broke down and the hope for a deliverer and redeemer dwindled and gave room to deep disappointment and resignation.

A small number of *bhagats* remained faithful to their vows. They continue to abstain from all flesh except that of goats which have been sacrificed to one of the Hindu gods, and they drink no spirits. Fish however, is not prohibited. Tobacco is smoked only among themselves or with their *gurus* (personal religious preceptors).

During the freedom movement in India in the Second World War the Tana Bhagats fought along with the revolutionary Hindu Congress workers. Under the leadership of Congress revolutionaries they raided liquor shops, destroyed roads and telegraph lines, attacked police stations and government offices, held black flag demonstrations and offered *satyagraha*. Cheerfully they went to jail or paid large fines in the interest of the national freedom movement.

(d) *Hindu Reform Movements*

The Bachhi-dan Bhagats have to an even greater extent than the Tana Bhagats adopted Hindu ideology. It is significant that this Bachhi-dan Bhagat movement was joined mainly by wealthy Oraons who thus entered a rather exclusive club or religious association. The movement employs Gosains or degraded Brahmins as priests and religious preceptors (*gurus*) and in a number of cases also Vaishnava Bairagis who usually belong to the lower Hindu castes.

These Bhagats are commonly known as Bachhi-dan (calf giving)

hymns (*bhajans*) and incantations which they have learned from their Hindu *gurus*.

Thus the Bachhi-dan Bhagats among the Oraons have succeeded in infusing a large amount of Hindu ideals into their tribal culture in a rather harmonious manner and without cutting themselves loose from their own tribal society. They follow thus a kind of Bhakti worship which is modified by tribal tradition and custom and so differs to some extent from the Bhakti cult of the orthodox Hindus. But the Bachhi-dan Bhagat Gosains seem to tolerate this modification.

The Kabir Panthis, are another Hindu sect enjoying the patronage of the Oraons. The *gurus* of the Kabir Panth — like those of the Bachhi-dan Bhagats — also belong usually to a Hindu caste, but at least in one area some Oraons have begun to function as religious preceptors. On the whole the beliefs and rites of the Kabir Panth differ only slightly from those of the other Bhakti cults. There is, however, one difference: The Kabir Panth *gurus* act not only as spiritual teachers but as priests. Their ministrations are obligatory for the religious service that must be performed on such important occasions as birth, marriage and death. But Oraons who join the Kabir Panth do not completely abandon tribal customs. The regular Oraon ceremonies are always performed, either after or before the Kabir Panth rites and in addition to them.

The Kabir Panth Bhagats do not form a strictly endogamous group within the Oraon tribal community, though these *bhagats* prefer to marry among themselves. The most important articles of faith in the Kabir Panth, as practised by the Oraon Bhagats are as follows

Abstention from the worship of idols and other visible symbols of divinity; abjuration of intoxicating drink and its use for libation; prohibition of bloody sacrifices and of the eating of beef, pork and fowl's meat; no worship of spirits and minor deities; belief in a single personal God, and his worship through love and devotion; the practice of certain ethical principles, such as a high regard for truth, honesty and fairness in conduct, kindness to all living beings, and a tolerant attitude towards those who differ in status and belief; the employment of *gurus* as spiritual preceptors and priests; the wearing of a rosary (*mala*) or at least a

head of the sacred *basil*, which the *guru* ties around his disciples neck at the time of initiation

No doubt, the perfect observance of all these articles of faith by the Kabir Panthis is an ideal rarely reached by the Oraon Bhagats. For the Oraons are an easy going people and are rarely very strict in the observance of rules. Thus even the *bhagats* have to make some allowance for a liberal interpretation of rules. But it is not to the discredit of some of the Gosains that they do not admit Oraon candidates at once into their community, but demand of them a year's probation before giving them formal admittance (*kan phuki*, initiation, lit, 'ear-whispering'). During this year of probation the candidates are required to observe strictly all rules of ritual purity in food and drink and other habits, and so prove their fitness for *bhagat* society, either of the Bachhi-dan Bhagats or of the Kabir Panthis. The *gurus* of the various Panthis take these special precautions because they realize that the Oraon Bhagats are exposed to great temptation to break these rules of ritual purity, since they live permanently among Oraons who eat meat and drink liquor as often as they can afford these things.

While the Oraon Bhagats thus cannot be put under the obligation of observing the Hindu rules of ritual purity in their full strictness, and while even the cults of Bhaktu, as practised by the Oraon Bhagats suffer some modifications and are adapted to Oraon mentality and tradition, the infusion of Hindu elements into the traditional Oraon culture and religion has immensely increased their self respect, intensified their conservatism and stiffened their faithful adherence to ancient customs and beliefs. It has also rendered them immune to non Hindu alien influences, such as Muslim and Christian influences. It is a fact that these *bhagats* represent the core of resistance to Christian conversion work among the Oraons.

But on the other hand it should not be completely ignored that these *bhagats* are imbued with a narrow minded communal spirit and thus become a willing audience for fanatics who can call upon them at any time for acts of violence, when they can be persuaded that their tribe's religious social or economic interests are at stake.

These *bhagats* keep the hope for a future liberator alive. In present troubled times similar messianic movements begin to rise here and there just as they did fifty years ago, they too are

partly inspired by wishes for religious reform and partly by political aspirations — the agitation for Jharkhand, for instance, a province of their own, inhabited and ruled by Oraons and other tribal communities alone, with the exclusion of all alien elements

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3 MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS AMONG THE SANTALS

Similar messianic movements can be reported of the Santals, a Mundari-speaking aboriginal tribe whose territory is contiguous to the northern boundaries of the Munda region. The tribe is very large, in 1951 it numbered over 2.8 million. The social and economic conditions of the Santals at the time of the rise of messianic movements among them were practically the same as those of the Mundas and Oraons.

In 1793 the British administration gave Bengal a "Permanent Settlement" which created a new class of landlords after the English pattern. The Santals whose labour was required to cultivate the new estates were enticed by the promise of high wages or rent free farms to leave their jungle homes where they enjoyed freedom and independence. Those who followed the invitation of the new landlords now became tenants or agricultural labourers. Once they had accepted service they were enslaved as agricultural serfs, or mercilessly exploited as tenants. The promises made to them were not honoured. The Santals who had abandoned their original homesteads in the hills could not return to them, because they had been occupied by other settlers.

The Santals, harassed by their landlords and exploited by usurers beyond endurance, could, however, get no redress in the British courts. Knowing only their own language, the Santals, they could not make themselves understood, while interpreters and pleaders were in the pay of their oppressors. Consequently they were often unjustly condemned. Oppression was fiercest in the so-called *Damin i Koh* — a government estate in the north-east

of the Santal Parganas, extending over 1,356 square miles, where the Santals had settled only a few decades before

Gradually tensions heightened and many disturbing rumours were spread through the Santal country. One was that mythical snakes of a voracious type were moving around and swallowing men. Various precautions had to be adopted to protect the Santals from the snakes. To carry out the rites of placation many men were kept away from their homes and their work, and the fields were neglected. Their wives, in their absence had to stay all the while in bed. Seized with fear they were not allowed to put their feet to the ground.

Another rumour had it that a mysterious buffalo cow was wandering through the country and that wherever it stopped to graze all the people died. To protect themselves against this cow the Santals dug up all the grass around their houses and villages.

Still another rumour ran to the effect that people were coming to kill all foreign settlers (*diku*) among the Santals especially the most hated Bengalis. Bullock skins and flutes should be hung up at the boundaries of the villages to indicate that Santals lived in them, or they too would be killed.

Women who had an equal number of children were encouraged by anonymous orders to become friends and to exchange presents. They visited each other, exchanged clothes and ate a joint meal. This custom was probably introduced among the Santals to cultivate a strong feeling of solidarity, between them individually as well as between the various village communities and clans. When the rebellion started the Santals could present a common front.

The whole tribal community became deeply disturbed by all these anonymous rumours whose origins could never be traced. The general unrest began to explode here and there into acts of violence. Some Santals tried to rob the merchants and money lenders (*mahajans*) of their ill earned wealth by dacoities, burglaries and thefts, which were according to a contemporary report well merited reprisals for their extortions.

The first messianic movement arose in 1854. Bir Singh Parganaite (district headman) of Sasan in Lachimpur declared that their principal God Chando Bonga, had appeared before

him, and had given him some magical charms by which he could put to instant sleep any man whom he desired to relieve of his wealth.

He consequently collected a band of followers with the intention of committing robbery. With his band he broke into a number of houses and committed robberies. However, the Bengalis (*diku*) of the district became suspicious of Bir Singh and his band and kept a watch on their movements. They also questioned them about *their reasons for holding meetings at night*. Bir Singh replied that during their nightly meetings he and his followers worshipped God Shiva of Gadi (a place of pilgrimage lying five miles north of Barhait). The *mahajans* were not quite satisfied with this explanation and reported their movements to the police officer of Dighi and requested him to take prompt measures to check Bir Singh's activities. As the police officer paid no attention to their application, they reported the matter to Rani Kshemasundari, the *zamundar* of Ambar Pargana (Pakur Raj). The manager of her estate passed orders to the *Naiib* (revenue officer) of the Santal *mahals* to look into the matter.

But this man was himself one of the most hated oppressors and exploiters of the Santals. He summoned Bir Singh Manjhi to the office of the estate, and without further inquiries imposed a heavy fine on Bir Singh and demanded its immediate payment. When Bir Singh pleaded his innocence and expressed his inability to pay such a heavy fine, he was *mercilessly beaten with shoes* before his followers. This treatment naturally outraged Bir Singh and his disciples, and they avenged themselves by further dacoities and robberies of the merchants and money-lenders. Thus one night Bir Singh and his band broke into the house of a rich merchant at Kusma near Barhait. The guards employed by the merchant fled and Bir Singh was able to loot the house at leisure. On that occasion he also broke into other houses of Kusma.

On the following day, the merchants sent a report to the police. The police inspector went with a batch of constables to arrest the Santal dacoits; meanwhile they had escaped and could not be apprehended, so the police officer harassed another but innocent Santal named Gocho. This man was wealthy and in possession of many gold *mohurs* and silver coins. The money-lenders therefore accused him of theft and the police officer handled him roughly.

Later, he even arrested him and other Santals and inflicted severe punishment on them though they could not be convicted of any *crime*

The measures adopted by the police officer to suppress the robberies of Bir Singh and the harassment of Gocho so incensed the Santals that six or seven thousand of them came from Birbhum Bankura Chota Nagpur and Hazaribagh early in 1855 to avenge the punishment inflicted on their innocent caste fellows

Their endurance had reached its maximum and while the people were in this state of mental stress and resentment it needed but a spark to kindle a conflagration This spark was released by two brothers Sido and Kanhu who gradually emerged from tribal anonymity as the outstanding and undisputed leaders of all Santals Sido and Kanhu were later joined by their younger brothers Chandu and Bhairab All four brothers were living at Bhagnadihi a village some miles south of Barhait The village had suffered severely under Hindu usurers and furthermore the father of the four brothers had lost his ancestral land to them The four brothers had long been brooding over their real or imaginary wrongs

They now gave out that they had witnessed a divine apparition and that they had received a divine message The story ran that Thakur Bonga the Great Spirit had appeared to them seven times and each time in a different disguise First he came in the form of a cloud descending from the skies, then as a tongue of fire thirdly as a hooded figure the face veiled in mist fourthly as a shadow in the full sunlight where no earthly shadow fell fifthly as a mountain rising suddenly out of the earth sixthly as a *Sal* tree springing up where no trees ever grew and last as a white man but clothed like a Santal simply with a cloth about his loins At his last appearance the Deity gave the brothers a sacred book wherein no words were written the pages of which they were enjoined to distribute far and wide throughout the Santal country as a sign to prepare for the great events to come by which all their wrongs would be redressed and the Santals become once more a free people So from hand to hand and village to village passed these slips of paper apparently meaningless and vague yet stirring the race to its depths and by their very mysteriousness appealing with supreme force to the Santal mind

A shrine was erected consisting of a mound of mud crowned by a primitive cart wheel — a round pierced slab of *Sal* wood (*Boswellia serrata*), at which the Santals were instructed to present offerings of grain and milk, and to sacrifice goats and buffaloes

The news of the divine apparition spread far and wide, and was proclaimed as a sure indication that the time was ripe for the Santals to start their rising. The insurrection should aim at the slaughter of all usurers and officers, at the banishment of traders and landlords, and all rich Bengalis from the Santal country. The Santals should also sever their connection with the *Damin-i-koh*, and fight all who resisted them, including the British. They should have no fear, as the bullets of their enemies would be turned into water.

The two leaders *Sido* and *Kanhu* then issued the order that one man from each family should come to fight and proceeded to give the Santals a military organization. They themselves assumed the rank of *Subah* (officers) and installed their closest friends and associates as lieutenants (*Naibs*, *Darogas*, etc.) whom the mass of Santals should obey promptly and blindly. The Santals accepted these orders eagerly, moved obviously by their deeply ingrained desire for independence and for recognition as lords of the soil, with the idea of establishing a kingdom for themselves.

However, before the signal for the revolt was to be given all the Santal villages were to be purified and all the evil spirits were to be driven out. The two leaders consequently gave orders for a general drive against witches in their midst. If anyone's wife or daughter-in-law was found by ordeal to be a witch, she was mercilessly taken and killed by the followers of *Sido* and *Kanhu*. If the relatives of the unfortunate women objected to their murder they too were threatened with death.

But even after this purification the revolt did not start immediately. The natural inclination of the Santals for procrastination asserted itself. The leaders proclaimed that they would first try out all other avenues for a peaceful settlement of their problems. If the officers of the British administration had been sympathetic, even at this stage a bloody rebellion could have been averted, but all the appeals of the Santal leaders were summarily rejected by the haughty British officials whose minds

had been poisoned by false and malicious reports of court pleaders and landlords

As a last peaceful step the Santal leaders decided on a corporate march of all Santals to Calcutta, the capital, with the intention of appealing in person to the Governor-General of India. First they sent cups filled with oil and vermilion, or branches of the *Sal* tree, from village to village to placate the spirits and to call the Santals together for this march. About 30,000 Santals, together with their wives and children, obeyed the summons and assembled at Bhagnadaha in June 1855 to march under the leadership of Sido and Kanhu in a body to Calcutta and to place their petition of grievances before the Governor-General in person.

But the way to Calcutta proved to be longer than they had imagined. Soon their provisions gave out and they were forced to plunder some markets. This of course provoked police action. At Pachkuta, north of Barhau, an over-eager and ambitious Indian police officer rashly intercepted them and tried to arrest the two brothers. But he only provoked violence. When he laid his hand on Sido to arrest him the Santal leader felled him, and the angry crowd then hacked to death his escort consisting of eight constables.

Thus on 7 July 1855, the Santal rebellion (*hul*) precipitately and against the initial intention of the leaders broke out in its full fury. Soon other Santal chiefs and headmen joined the rebel group, sent the *Sal* branch their traditional symbol of war, through the villages raised their own private armies and began the rebellion by looting markets and killing a number of their worst oppressors.

The rebellion was marked by scenes of inhuman cruelty. The most brutal outrages were committed on the Bengalis whom the Santals regarded as their main enemies. But they also murdered police officers and even innocent people whom they met on the way. Santals who refused to join the rebels were also killed.

Sido and Kanhu regarded themselves as absolute masters of the Santals. Wherever they camped they made the boys and girls of the village dance and if a woman or girl caught their fancy they sent their orderlies and took the woman or girl into their camp. If a man objected he was killed by the orderlies.

The Government as well as the public had been taken by

surprise by this sudden rising and at first quite inadequate measures were adopted to suppress it. Before the Government realized the seriousness of the outbreak many villages had been burned property pillaged people killed and the country devastated. Finally towards the end of July all available troops were mobilized and sent against the Santal rebels. But in spite of their superior arms and strategy it took them about six months to put down the rebellion. Santals were killed in great numbers as they fought with reckless courage and suicidal obstinacy. When they saw that everything was lost many did not want to survive and fought with their primitive weapons against the rifles of the soldiers. Finally the British troops resorted to the burning of the Santal villages and destruction of all grain stores with the intention of starving the rebels into submission. Even then many of them retreated into the jungle where more fell prey to hunger and exposure.

Gradually all the ringleaders of the insurrection were rounded up and summarily tried and hanged. Sido was betrayed early in the rebellion by some of his followers and handed over to the British troops. According to some reports he was killed in an engagement with troops but other reports say that he his three brothers and many other leaders were all sentenced to death and hanged.

Finally the British troops themselves grew tired of killing badly armed or defenceless people and of burning the villages of many Santals who had joined the insurrection more because they had been forced to do so by their own leaders than out of conviction. Many things happened in the heat of the campaign which later were condemned by higher authority. Deprived of their leaders decimated and starved by the Government troops and finally tired of their own violence and opposition the Santals gave themselves up and sued for peace.

The rising however had one good effect it opened the eyes of the British officials finally to the extent of oppression which the Santals had to suffer. It was decided to introduce a special system of administration for those districts chiefly inhabited by Santals. They were directly placed under the jurisdiction of British officers and given a large degree of self administration the headmen of each village being held directly responsible. But owing to a ruling of the Advocate General in 1863 the districts began to relapse into

the regulation system and the privileges of the Santals were lost. Oppression and exploitation by landlords and usurers began again to spread in the Santal area. Extensive rack renting took place, ejectment of village headmen, seizure of rent free lands of village priests and others, breaking up of the village community system so much cherished by the Santals, and other acts of oppression were perpetrated by the landlords. In consequence of this deterioration of the economic and social conditions of the Santals another messianic movement began to grow. This time it was of a different type.

The new movement was called the Kherwar Movement, since *Kheruar* (villagers) was the original name of the Santal tribe. Its aim was the return of the Santals to their original culture and religion. It was announced that their present oppression was a divine punishment for abandoning the worship of God and for venerating in his place minor and evil spirits. Deliverance could come only through a radical change of heart. It would bring back that Golden Age when the Santals had been undisputed masters of their own land. Then they had worshipped God alone and no evil spirits.

The various leaders of the Kherwar Movement always insisted that the worship of the spirits (*bongas*) was an apostasy from God (Thakur Jiu), who alone should be worshipped by the Santals. This tradition of a former purer belief ordinarily does not trouble the Santals, but the dormant memory of God is awakened when anything extraordinary happens—a famine or epidemic, for instance. Then the Santals feel guilty of abandoning their Supreme God and worshipping the spirits and they vow to reform themselves. This also explains the spasmodic character of the movement. In times of comparative plenty and prosperity very little is heard of it; during times of distress the movement revives.

This was in essence the teaching of Bhagrīt—the name appears to be a corruption of Bhagirath—of Taldiha, a Santal who in 1871 set himself up as a religious teacher (*babaji*). Of his childhood nothing is known. But from his teaching it can be surmised that he had either been a Christian or at any rate had been in a Christian school.

From accounts given by Santal devotees of Bhagrīt it appears that the new Santal Messiah pursued the following methods. In

the early morning he gave audience to his clients, they had to bring him a leaf-cup full of sun dried rice (not the ordinary rice boiled before husking), milk in a brass pot (*lota*), a bit of betel nut and one pice (smallest copper coin) This was all placed before the *babaji*, who listened to what they had to say, but kept silent till all had put in their petitions

Bhagrit would then admonish them with the following words "You have now brought your petitions to me, I shall lay them before God (Chando) All will be well with anyone whose petition pleases God If he does not, he must come again Come twice, thrice, or even oftener, make your petitions to me, and I shall pray to Him for you You must also continue to pray to Him, and then you shall reap the benefit If anyone is in serious trouble, he must keep watch throughout the night "

The following morning, before sunrise, he asked the people whether they had kept watch If they said that they had slept he scolded them, saying that they had come only to eat If they said that they had watched, he asked them whether they had seen Chando come down and heard Him talk to Bhagrit This, of course, was news to them, and they were treated to a new admonition, Bhagrit charging them with lying and telling them that it was their fault that they had got no help Then he started preaching to them, admonishing them to observe certain precepts which in essence were much like the Ten Commandments He asked them to avoid all evil doing otherwise they would not get God's blessing

As time went on, his style of preaching altered somewhat, probably because people did not attain their wishes and attendance fell off He had to find something to explain the one and to counteract the other He now said that all evil had to be purged out, and that all should come to him with one heart 'We or our fathers have sinned utterly, when our sins are fully atoned for, we shall be the owners of the land '

In course of time Bhagrit collected a good deal of money, of which he and his helpers kept most Then, in spite of his promises there was a severe famine in 1874 When the British imported Burma rice to feed the starving people, Bhagrit told his followers that now they could see how God was working for them The Sahibs were afraid The rice which they brought was rice

formerly given by the Santals to the spirits (*bongas*) and now it was brought back by the foreign rulers under some pretext. It was for the Santals to eat but they must be very careful not to let fowls or pigs pollute it and they should bathe daily and then cook their food. This ritualistic purity which Bhagrīt demanded from his followers was certainly a concession to Hinduistic ideas.

Bhagrīt believed that during the time of the famine the Santals should take steps to get their land back. He said that in Sido's and Kanhu's time i.e. during the 1855 rebellion it had been God's desire to give the country back to the Santals but they had sinned especially by marrying women of other caste and thus God had refused to help them. Now they should be more careful and cleanse themselves of all sins. Bhagrīt's followers listened to his admonitions and killed all their pigs and fowls. But they were generally wise enough to eat them and not to let so much meat go to waste.

Bhagrīt's teaching assumed more and more a political slant. He began to proclaim that the land which the Santals cultivated belonged by right to them and that no Government could demand taxes from them. In his meetings he used to pass a bowl of rice around asking 'Who has created this grain?' His disciples answered 'God has created it.' And Bhagrīt put his second question 'And who has ploughed the ground and sown the seed?' 'We did the ploughing and the sowing' was the angry answer of the disciples. Bhagrīt then summed up 'If we did the ploughing and sowing and God let the crops grow why should we pay taxes to the Government?'

Bhagrīt's followers were known as *Kherwar* or *Sapha Hor* (pure men). They finally decided to revolt at a given signal and to drive all non *Kherwars* out of their country. After this Bhagrīt would rule over them.

But before Bhagrīt could give the signal for the revolt he was arrested and thrown into jail. Deprived of their leader and head the rebels did not dare to strike. Gradually the excitement subsided and with it died the hope of the Santals for independence and a paradise on earth of which they had dreamed so fondly.

However this hope did not die completely. Bhagrīt had several successors. They too were called *babajs* or *gurus* and worked much as he did. Several of them told the people that

they had been commissioned by God to work for them for a certain time i.e. for three or five years, when that period expired they ceased working for the Santals. It is clear that most of them had come into contact with Christian missionaries. They declared that they could not cure sick persons, but that God did. Only those who believed were healed, and doubters would not benefit in any way. The people must live a clean life and not use filthy language.

Some of the *babajys* started regular prayer meetings for the Santals on Sundays and prohibited Sunday labour for them and their cattle. They further advised the people to be kind to their animals, and not to strike them on the head or on the bones (otherwise they would cry to God, who would punish the offenders), and to leave pasture grounds for them.

One of them introduced Rama, the Hindu deity, identifying him with God. At the end of his Sunday meeting, after his sermon he called out with a loud voice 'Ram Chando duhai' and all those present would repeat the blessing.

Some, but only a minority, gave the movement a political aspect by inciting the people to refuse payment of taxes for their land holdings on the ground that land which they had reclaimed from the jungle belonged solely to them. Nearly all these and later *babajys* appeared first in the vicinity of Godda—a town north of Dumka. From Godda the movement spread southwards and eastwards.

The Kherwar movement was revived in 1880 largely due to the preaching of one Dubia Gosain who is said to have appeared from somewhere near Deoghar and was more Hinduistic than others of his type. He commanded the Santals to kill their pigs and fowls and to conform to Hindu customs. He claimed divine authority, and obtained no little influence owing to letters containing his commands being circulated far and wide. Considerable excitement and a spirit of smouldering disaffection ensued among the Santals always on the look-out for supernatural manifestations. This excitement led to some disturbances in 1880-81 when the Census operations were carried out. Objection was taken to the numbering of houses and people and to the recording of their names, and interested agitators seized the opportunity to clamour for an independent tribal administration.

But the arrest of the *babaji* and the vigorous measures taken by Government prevented more serious trouble. A body of military police was posted in the District and troops were marched through the country to overawe the Santals.

Subsequently, in 1891, the Kherwars appear again to have taken advantage of the Census to frighten the Santals and to spread mischievous rumours in the Rajmahal sub-division. It was stated, for instance, that the British rule was coming to an end, the Kherwars would rule in their place, and no taxes would have to be paid. All Santals except the Kherwars would be made Christians. The soil of the country being dark belonged to the dark-skinned people and not to the white men, who would go back to their own country where the soil was white.

In 1930 one Bangam Manjhi, of Borobera, inaugurated a reform movement among the Santals of Gumia which assumed some importance. Claiming some sort of mysterious inspiration Bangam Manjhi gathered around him thousands of disciples. His teachings were simple and fully in agreement with the tenets of the *Sapha Hor* of the Kherwar Movement. Bangam asked his followers to wash their mouth and to bathe their body daily, to abstain from flesh food and liquor but he added some modern prohibitions, such as the prohibition of buying mill-woven cloth. They should use handwoven cloth (*khadi*) exclusively.

Since these principles of Bangam agreed with some important items of the programme of the Congress Party his movement attracted the attention of the local Congress leaders. It happened just at this time that two of the local Congress leaders were prosecuted by the British Government and sentenced to one year's imprisonment because they had refused to furnish security for their keeping aloof from anti-British activities. The prosecution of the two prominent Congress leaders gave a great impetus to the movement among the Santals. Their meetings were held on full moon nights and some of them were attended by such prominent persons as Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Dr. Rajendra Prasad. In May 1930 two hundred and ten Santals were invested with the sacred thread and these later induced others to join the movement.

Thus every now and then, especially in the years when the crops failed and famine or other calamities threatened, new

prophets arose who claimed to possess miraculous powers the power to cure diseases to procure offspring and prosperity etc. Many *Sapha Hor* (i.e. ritually pure men) could still be found in the Santal country, wearing their hair in long matted tresses who abstained from eating pork and fowls' meat and abhorred liquor. They worshipped Mahadeo (god Shiva of the Hindus) and only killed animals (goats) when they performed a sacrifice. In this and other aspects the *babajus* — as they were called — showed a decided partiality for Hindu traditions and customs but they had also adopted some Christian beliefs and practices though they had sometimes changed them and perverted them to serve their own particular purposes.

During the Second World War especially in the years 1942 and 1943 the *Sapha Hor* of the Santals took a prominent part in the Indian freedom movement. Inspired and guided by revolutionaries from Bihar and Bengal they joined not only the demonstrations but committed many acts of violence. They burned police stations and government houses and many liquor shops destroyed bridges and roads severed telegraph lines and tampered with railway lines. For these acts of sabotage many *Sapha Hor* had to go to jail.

After Indian Independence was achieved the Kherwar Movement did not however, come to final rest. There began the agitation of Jaipal Singh for Jharkhand a separate province in which the aboriginals would be able to live for themselves and pursue their old tribal habits of life. This political movement came to naught but invariably whenever the Kherwar Movement is revived it assumes a political aspect.

Only a few years ago one Petal Singh of Palamau District with the intention of forming an independent Kherwar pocket created an agitation in the Santal area and terrorized his own people. The Indian government arrested him and sentenced him to three years imprisonment.

Whenever the Santals start thinking of the old days they conceive them as the Golden Age when they were free and happy. If so they argue they reform and revert to their old ways of life why should not their old freedom come back also with no foreigners to harass them and extort taxes from them? The result is that the Kherwars always lend a willing ear to

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4 AMONG THE HOS

Another important Mundari-speaking tribe—settled mainly in the Singhbhum District of Bihar—is the Ho tribe. The Hos number over 400,000. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, when the British attempted to bring the Ho tribe under their control, this fierce, war-like and freedom-loving tribe resisted with great obstinacy and bravery.

It was not until 1827, after many of their villages had been burned and a large number of their people killed, that they submitted. But they merely bade their time, and when in 1831 the Mundas of Chota Nagpur broke out into revolt, the Hos joined them. This new insurrection was caused by the new policy of the British Government of farming revenue to outsiders, and by the introduction of judicial and revenue regulations of the Bengal Government into the tribal country. The wrath of the rebels was specially vented upon the non-tribal Hindu and Muslim settlers, about a thousand of whom were killed or burned in their houses.

The rebels were led by outstanding leaders and often by so-called *bhagats*, men who claimed to have religious authority and to possess magic powers. They were most anxious to retain and to preserve the ancient customs and rules of life of the Hos, and the worship of the tribal gods.

One of those famous religious leaders of the Hos was Buddho Bhagat of Silligaon, in the thickly populated Churia region of Singhbhum. He took a prominent part in the fight for freedom.

connections with the neighbouring Rajas. One of his wives came from the Bishnupur Rajas family and the other from Manbhum. One of his daughters was married to one Kanu Babu of Ambikanagar the second to Hari Babu of the same pargana the third to Amru Babu of Manbhum and the fourth (by a concubine) to an illegitimate Babu of the Panchet Rajas family. These matrimonial alliances stood him in good stead and he was generally supported by his relatives in the subsequent revolt.

Then he concentrated on gaining the favour of the Bhumi people and their leaders the *sardars*. This was easy for his enemy Madhava Singh had made himself thoroughly unpopular as *duwan*. Madhava Singh used his office to become a usurious money lender and extortionate grain-dealer and the majority of the Bhumi detested him heartily.

Ganga Narayan on the other hand had the full sympathy of the Bhumi who remembered the injustice done to his father and resented Ganga Narayan's persecution by Madhava Singh and his ill treatment by the British officials. Indeed Ganga Narayan was popularly held to be a victim of an implacable and tragic fate—his nearest relations dishonouring and oppressing him while he was debarred by his rank from seeking employment either in trade or in the army. What course could he adopt?

Ganga Narayan possessed other qualities of character which endeared him to his people and made him the born leader of the masses. Long years of destitution had developed in him an iron will he also showed great organizing ability. He possessed great courage considerable intelligence and a rare resolution of mind in the pursuance of his aims. But through years of suffering he had become cruel at heart and cunning making him peculiarly capable of leading a ferocious band of tribesmen in revolt. The simple Bhumi believed him to be an incarnation (*avatar*) of Kalki the God of Death and under the all powerful protection of the goddess Kali. Ganga Narayan's influence over the Bhumi and especially over the *ghatuwas* (guards of the passes) was unlimited and they looked up to him as their leader and saviour.

In April 1832 Ganga Narayan decided to strike. At the head of a large force of *ghatuwas* he made an attack on Madhava Singh and slew him. This deed was committed with great deliberation

cunning and cruelty Madhava was seized and carried off to the hills to be sacrificed First Ganga Narayan himself felled him with his battle-axe, then each *sardar ghatwala* was made to discharge an arrow at him, and in this way all the leading *ghatwalas* became implicated in the plot

The murderous gang then proceeded to plunder the whole country This soon attracted all the Chuars (lit 'robbers') to Ganga Narayan's standard, i.e. all the Bhumij of Barabhum and adjoining estates, intent on gaining booty

Ganga Narayan attacked Barabazar, where the Raja lived, sacked it, burned the Munsiff's office and the police station, from which the police had fled, but three unfortunate runners (peons) of the Munsiff's court were caught and killed With his levies, which included other tribes too, and numbered between two and three thousand he even attacked government troops

The situation became so threatening that in the first week of June 1832, the government force had to retreat to Bankura leaving Barabhum to the possession of the rebel chief Ganga Narayan assumed the title of Raja, and levied contributions from the surrounding country Soon he also began to plunder the estates to the east of Barabhum The Bhumij Kols of the district joined him and the situation became fraught with danger

At the height of his power thousands of tribesmen were on the move with Ganga Narayan ready to do or die He would lead them on horse-back, traversing the whole of the Jungle Mahals district and a part of Midnapur from one corner to the other Thus he defied the British power for about a year

During this time the rebel leader was responsible for the murder of a number of people It is related that his pass word for putting anybody to death was *Ghat par kur* (Show him across the pass!) Thus, whenever a prisoner was brought before his tribunal on the Dulma (hill) and all he had to say and to urge had been heard, he was dismissed either with that or some other significant phrase No man who heard Ganga order him to be "shown across the *ghat*" found himself alive an hour later, he was led down the hill and killed at the bottom

Finally, in November the British collected a military force consisting of three regiments of Native Infantry and eight guns When the military operations began in earnest, the rebels were

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4 AMONG THE HOS

Another important Mundari speaking tribe—settled mainly in the Singhbhum District of Bihar—is the Ho tribe. The Hos number over 400,000. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century when the British attempted to bring the Ho tribe under their control this fierce war-like and freedom-loving tribe resisted with great obstinacy and bravery.

It was not until 1827 after many of their villages had been burned and a large number of their people killed that they submitted. But they merely bide their time and when in 1831 the Mundas of Chota Nagpur broke out into revolt the Hos joined them. This new insurrection was caused by the new policy of the British Government of farming revenue to outsiders and by the introduction of judicial and revenue regulations of the Bengal Government into the tribal country. The wrath of the rebels was specially vented upon the non-tribal Hindu and Muslim settlers about a thousand of whom were killed or burned in their houses.

The rebels were led by outstanding leaders and often by so-called *bhagats* men who claimed to have religious authority and to possess magic powers. They were most anxious to retain and to preserve the ancient customs and rules of life of the Hos and the worship of the tribal gods.

One of those famous religious leaders of the Hos was Buddho Bhagat of Silligaon in the thickly populated Churia region of Singhbhum. He took a prominent part in the fight for freedom.

The British officers charged with the quelling of the insurrection believed that his capture or death would lead to a speedy pacification of the Churia region. They therefore concentrated their attack on him.

In February 1832, after they had received heavy reinforcements, the British troops marched towards Silligaon. The village was surrounded by four companies of infantry and a troop of cavalry, and then the attack began. Buddho Bhagat with his hand put up a stubborn resistance. The Kol rebels around their venerable aged chief stood like a rock facing the hail of bullets. Buddho's whole family and closest disciples fought with bows and arrows against the muskets, and in the last hand-to-hand fight with their formidable battle-axes against the pistols and sabres of the soldiers.

The old leader perished with all his sons and relatives and about a hundred and fifty of his followers. This fight to the last and suicidal stubbornness was certainly inspired by a kind of religious despair. The leader with his followers preferred to die rather than to submit to a life under British domination and harassing interference by unsympathetic and conceited officials. Buddho Bhagat judged life not worth living under such degrading conditions.

His head, as well as the heads of his brother and nephew were cut off and brought in to the Commissioners' Camp. The troops got the reward of rupees one thousand for the Bhagat's head. The money was divided among the non-commissioned officers and the privates.

As predicted by the British officers, many Kol rebels laid down their arms after Buddho's death and tendered submission to the Commissioners. Such was the reputation of the old Bhagat that his death removed their last hope for a chance of victory over the British.

However, in other parts of the country the insurrection went on. The fight was marked by ruthless severities on both sides and nearly five thousand square miles of territory were laid waste in crushing the resistance of the Hos. Contemporary critics of the Ho campaign painted an "unhappy picture" of the joint Commissioners, exasperated by the insolent rebel chiefs and giving vent to their rage by "making examples" and punishing many innocent Kols who had been misled by their leaders. One of

them describes vividly the harrowing scene of the massacre at Silligton how women and children were found in the midst of the dead bodies the women holding out their babies and screaming abuse at the cruel killers.

However, the Kols continued to be refractory, and military operations had to be undertaken in 1836 and 1838 before they finally submitted to the British authority.

It is curious that apart from Buddha Bhagat no outstanding messianic leader seems to have risen among the Hos. This may be due to the fact that the Hos have a rather vigorous tribal organization with influential village headmen (*murdas*) and sub-division headmen (*mankas*) who watch over their subjects well and keep influences from outside at a minimum. Thus the Hos have withstood the inroads of Hindu and Christian cultures remarkably well.

However, not even the strictest vigilance of the tribal leaders will be able to preserve the tribal traditions and customs of the Hos in face of the overpowering influx of foreign elements since the recent development of industries in the heart of the Ho country where many mines and factories have been established. The Indian Government is anxious that these pockets of tribal culture shall soon disappear and give place to a uniform national culture.

LITERATURE: R. C. Majumdar *The History and Culture of the Indian People* vol. ix Bombay 1963 pp. 451-55. I. C. Choudhury *Bihar District Casteless Neighbourhood* Patna 1958. F. J. Shore *Note on Indian Affairs* Calcutta 1837. J. C. Jha *Kol Insurrection in Chota Nagpur* Calcutta 1961.

5 AMONG THE BHUMIJ

The Bhumij according to H. H. Risley⁴ a branch of the Munda race who have spread eastward mingled with the Hindus and thus for the most part severed their connection with the parent tribe. In Barabhum (Chota Nagpur) they speak a dialect of Hindi while in Manbhum they have still retained their Mundari tongue. In the early decades of the nineteenth century they were ruled by petty chieftains called Rajas who proudly claimed to have exercised independent authority over their subjects for more than fifty generations. At least the Rajas always pretended to be Rajputs though many of them are obviously of tribal origin.

⁴ H. H. Risley *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* vol. I Calcutta 1891 p. 117.

connections with the neighbouring R \ddot{a} jas. One of his wives came from the Bishnupur Raja's family and the other from Manbh \ddot{u} m. One of his daughters was married to one Kanu Babu of Ambikanagar, the second to Hari Babu of the same pargana, the third to Amru Babu of Manbh \ddot{u} m and the fourth (by a concubine) to an illegitimate Babu of the Panchet Raja's family. These matrimonial alliances stood him in good stead and he was generally supported by his relatives in the subsequent revolt.

Then he concentrated on gaining the favour of the Bhumj people and their leaders, the *sardars*. This was easy, for his enemy Madhava Singh had made himself thoroughly unpopular as *dewan*. Madhava Singh used his office to become a usurious money lender and extortionate grain-dealer, and the majority of the Bhumj detested him heartily.

Ganga Narayan on the other hand had the full sympathy of the Bhumj who remembered the injustice done to his father and resented Ganga Narayan's persecution by Madhava Singh and his ill treatment by the British officials. Indeed Ganga Narayan was popularly held to be a victim of an implacable and tragic fate—his nearest relations dishonouring and oppressing him while he was debarred by his rank from seeking employment either in trade or in the army. What course could he adopt?

Ganga Narayan possessed other qualities of character which endeared him to his people and made him the born leader of the masses. Long years of destitution had developed in him an iron will; he also showed great organizing ability. He possessed great courage, considerable intelligence and a rare resolution of mind in the pursuance of his aims. But through years of suffering he had become cruel at heart and cunning, making him peculiarly capable of leading a ferocious band of tribesmen in revolt. The simple Bhumj believed him to be an incarnation (*avatar*) of K \ddot{a} l, the God of Death, and under the all-powerful protection of the goddess K \ddot{a} li. Ganga Narayan's influence over the Bhumj and especially over the *ghatw \ddot{a} las* (guards of the passes) was unlimited and they looked up to him as their leader and saviour.

In April 1832 Ganga Narayan decided to strike. At the head of a large force of *ghatw \ddot{a} las* he made an attack on Madhava Singh and slew him. This deed was committed with great deliberation.

cunning and cruelty Madhava was seized and carried off to the hills to be sacrificed First Ganga Narayan himself felled him with his battle axe, then each *sardar ghatuala* was made to discharge an arrow at him, and in this way all the leading *ghatuas* became implicated in the plot

The murderous gang then proceeded to plunder the whole country This soon attracted all the Chuars (lit 'robbers') to Ganga Narayan's standard, i.e. all the Bhumij of Barabhum and adjoining estates, intent on gaining booty

Ganga Narayan attacked Barabazar, where the Raja lived, sacked it, burned the Munsiff's office and the police station, from which the police had fled but three unfortunate runners (peons) of the Munsiff's court were caught and killed With his levies, which included other tribes too, and numbered between two and three thousand he even attacked government troops

The situation became so threatening that in the first week of June 1832, the government force had to retreat to Bankura leaving Barabhum to the possession of the rebel chief Ganga Narayan assumed the title of Raja and levied contributions from the surrounding country Soon he also began to plunder the estates to the east of Barabhum The Bhumij Kols of the district joined him and the situation became fraught with danger

At the height of his power thousands of tribesmen were on the move with Ganga Narayan ready to do or die He would lead them on horse back, traversing the whole of the Jungle Mahals district and a part of Midnapur from one corner to the other Thus he defied the British power for about a year

During this time the rebel leader was responsible for the murder of a number of people It is related that his pass word for putting anybody to death was *Ghat par kur* (Show him across the pass') Thus, whenever a prisoner was brought before his tribunal on the Dulma (hill) and all he had to say and to urge had been heard, he was dismissed either with that or some other significant phrase No man who heard Ganga order him to be shown across the *ghat* found himself alive an hour later, he was led down the hill and killed at the bottom

Finally in November the British collected a military force consisting of three regiments of Native Infantry and eight guns When the military operations began in earnest the rebels were

(a) Ganga Narayan's Movement

Around the thirties of the nineteenth century there was a strong unrest among the Bhumij in Bihar. Accustomed to lead their free lives without any control from outside they strongly resented the gradual extension and tightening control of British authority in their territory.

But for an insurrection against British domination and for deliverance from exploitation by rapacious landlords the Bhumij needed a leader. They chose a certain Ganga Narayan as their leader and saviour. This man was a disgruntled cousin of the Raja (Zamindar) of Barabhum. Ganga Narayan's motives for revolt against the Raja and the British were revenge and ambition while his followers desired freedom to return to their old ways of life and political independence. Both parties failed to achieve their aims: the British were strong enough to enforce law and order and to suppress any attempts to wage private wars of retribution. Moreover the times had forever passed for independent small principalities and the pressure of an increasing population proved too strong to allow the tribes a carefree and undisturbed leisurely life in their extensive jungle haunts.

According to Bhumij inheritance law the father of Ganga Narayan had been the legal heir to the throne of Barabhum because he was the son of the chief queen (Pat Rani). But the British, following their own laws of succession, ignored this claim because he was not the first born son of his father. This British decision resulted in a long series of judicial disputes in the courts about British notions of primogeniture and the tribal custom which held that it was the first born son of the chief queen and not necessarily the first born who succeeded to the zamindari. Finally the British courts decided against Lakshman Singh, the son of the Pat Rani. When he and his brother rose in arms against the usurper towards the end of the eighteenth century the British assisted in suppressing the rising, arrested him and kept him in jail until his death. But Lakshman Singh left a son, Ganga Narayan, who vowed to revenge his father.

When in 1798 the British-supported Raja died the same sort of succession struggle began in the Barabhum Zamindar's family. Ganga Narayan supported Raja Ganga Govind Singh against

his rival, Madhava Singh. Failing in his suit Madhava Singh resigned himself to his fate and was consoled by being appointed *duan*, or chief minister, to his brother. Naturally enough, Madhava Singh used his powers as chief minister to take revenge on his personal foe Ganga Narayan.

He deprived him of the revenue of tariff Punch Sardari which Ganga Narayan had been permitted to hold after his father's death. He even persuaded the Raja not to provide Ganga Narayan with the means of daily subsistence.

To quote Ganga Narayan's own words, 'I was destitute of food and if I asked any person in Barabhum for anything the Zamindar and Madhava Singh fined him one rupee four annas, and forbade him giving me anything in future. Madhava Singh has all along oppressed me, and when I represented the circumstance to the Zamindar he said that as long as Madhava Singh remained *duan* he could do nothing for me.'

Ganga Narayan added that once he had even been accused by the Mukhtar (agent) of the Raja of Barabhum of introducing illicit salt (by which probably he had begun to gain his subsistence). For this offence he had been arrested by the British troops though he had later been acquitted. On several pretexts Ganga Narayan was seized and sent up to the Magistrate of the Jungle Mahals by Madhava Singh. The vindictive minister subjected him in various other ways to great indignities. No wonder that Ganga Narayan felt vexed and bitter against the chief minister.

At one time Ganga Narayan was reduced to such distress that he was forced to don the garb of an ascetic and to go on pilgrimage as a Vaishnava monk (follower of god Vishnu). Only in this disguise could he hide his utter poverty and destitution.

Ganga Narayan hated not only Madhava Singh but the Raja too. Though he had supported him in the succession dispute the Raja did nothing for him and allowed Madhava Singh to harm and oppose him in every possible way. But most of all Ganga Narayan hated the British who had overridden the local succession rules, who had arrested his father and deprived him of his throne. And the British officials had repeatedly arrested him and subjected him to intolerable indignities.

All through the early years of the nineteenth century Ganga Narayan was planning his revenge. First he extended his family

soon driven to seek refuge in the hills. But they were relentlessly pursued there and fled with Ganga Narayan into Singhbhum. There Ganga Narayan endeavoured to enlist the invincible and irrepressible Larka Kols in his favour. They were just then at issue with one of their chiefs, who claimed supremacy over a portion of them, the Thakur of Kharsawan. They told Ganga Narayan that they were not unwilling to join in the fight, but wished, before they committed themselves to his leadership to test his capacity to lead. They therefore proposed an attack on Thakur Cheta Singh's Kharsawan Estate.

Thakur Cheta Singh was not unknown to Ganga Narayan. In fact, a short time before he had tried to win the Thakur over to his cause. In his letter to the Thakur he had explained that one of the reasons why he had taken up arms against the British government was that Mr. Russell, the Magistrate of the Jungle Mahals district, had insulted the Rajput Zamindar of Patkum by searching his private apartments during the Kol Insurrection in January-February 1832.

Now when the Larka Kols proposed to attack the Thakur, Ganga Narayan readily assented to lead them, but the Thakur's forces repulsed them and Ganga Narayan who had been hit by two arrows attempted to run away across a gram field. He was pursued and overtaken by the Thakur's barber who sprang on him and held him to the ground while some of his companions cut his head off.

The Thakur had the pleasure of sending Ganga Narayan's head to Captain Wilkinson, the British commander of the military operations. In his accompanying letter the Thakur asked for adequate protection for his person and property for he was much afraid of the vengeance of Ganga Narayan's followers. He also requested reward and compensation for in the encounter three of his men had been killed and thirty men and horses wounded.

Captain Wilkinson, expressing his sense of relief at the death of the rebel chief, sent the Thakur five thousand rupees as his reward.

The announcement of Ganga Narayan's death had a demoralizing effect on the insurgents and peace was soon restored. Other Bhumij leaders who had planned to join the rebellion held their peace. No other attempt was ever made by the Bhumij to restore

their independence and expel the British from their country. Ganga Narayan's fate is certainly full of tragedy. Had the British not made the fateful mistake of depriving him and his father of their legitimate inheritance, Ganga Narayan with his great qualities of leadership could have become a real leader and saviour of his people. Instead, his bitter resentment and desire for revenge led him and many of his followers to death and destruction. However, his name is unforgotten among the Bhumij and he has become a popular legend. The Bhumij remember him as the hero who attempted to deliver his subjects from the oppression of Madhava Singh and from the domination of a hated foreign rule. The Bhumij pride themselves in not having submitted to foreign domination without a manful struggle which lasted for about a year against the superior arms and training of the British troops.

LITERATURE J. C. Jha, Ganga Narayan and the Bhumij Revolt of 1832-33 *The Modern Review* vol 107 Calcutta 1962 pp 481-84. H. H. Risley *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* vol 1 Calcutta 1891 p 117. E. T. Dalton *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* Calcutta 1872 p 174. R. C. Majumdar *The History and Culture of the Indian People* vol 12 Bombay 1963 pp 455-56.

(b) *Modern Reform Movements*

After the revolt of Ganga Narayan broke down no other violent revolutionary movement was ever started by the Bhumij. But a peaceful and gradual infiltration of Hindu elements into their traditional culture took place which followed the pattern of the Bhagat movements among the other tribes of Chota Nagpur. The driving motive for this gradual Hinduization was the strong desire of the Bhumij to be incorporated in the second *varna* of the Hindu caste system—that of the Kshatriyas—and to be recognized as Rajputs. By giving up chicken meat and liquor, widow-marriage and Bhumij funeral rites and especially by enticing Brahmins with the promise of large grants of rent free tenures to act as their family priests, the wealthiest Bhumij landholders managed to be recognized as Kshatriyas. But the tribe as a whole did not succeed in its aspiration. The Bhumij in their majority were not prepared to forego chicken meat and liquor nor did they want to forbid widow marriage and give up their Bhumij religious rites.

clean life. But they lectured them also on the need of political independence and the necessity of ending British rule through non-violent passive resistance.

The reformatory programme of the Congress propagandists inspired a prominent Bhumij, Dinabandhu Singh to start a movement for the improvement of the Bhumij customs and manners and for the incorporation of the whole community in the Rajput caste. Dinabandhu Singh was at the time the acting Taraf Sardar of Bamni, the leader of a caste council (*panchayat*) for fifty nine villages.

At the same time another influential Bhumij leader in the neighbouring district (*pargana*) was engaged in the collection of scriptural proofs in support of the claims forwarded by the Bhumij for the position of Kshatriyas or Rajputs. In 1925 two meetings were held which, however, did not produce any tangible results. When this leader died, Dinabandhu Singh became the acclaimed leader of the Bhumij for both districts and his village Bamni the headquarters of the agitation for the recognition of the Bhumij as Kshatriyas. In 1935 Dinabandhu Singh convened a meeting of the Bhumij and founded an organization which was called "Manbhum Bhumij Kshatriya Samity."

In a memorandum, published by Dinabandhu's circle and circulated in the area under his jurisdiction and influence the proof was attempted by quoting the opinions of scholars and passages from the sacred scriptures of Hinduism that the Bhumij were in truth Kshatriyas. They were admonished to live up to their high status in the Hindu caste system and to abolish from their midst all customs which would degrade them in the eyes of the Hindus. Dinabandhu protested emphatically against their inclusion among the Scheduled Tribes.

Dinabandhu stated that the Puranas and Itihasas (history) had described the Bhumij indeed as Kshatriyas and that in the past the Bhumij had also practised the virtues of Kshatriyas such as self control and heroism but in present times the Bhumij were sadly failing in the observance of the ten typical (Hindu) rites, and had adopted rituals, festivals and religious habits which were tribal rather than Hindu.

At the meeting Dinabandhu implored his caste fellows to stop ploughing with cows, drinking rice-beer, eating chicken meat

practising levirate and widow-marriage, and forbade strictly as immoral the group dancing of the Bhumij women. He advised them to employ Hindu *gurus* and *purohīts* (priests) at wedding and funeral rites, and encouraged them to read the sacred scriptures of Hinduism. He promised his caste fellows that the Hindus would accept their claim to be true Kshatriyas if they only observed these rules faithfully. Two Brahmins whom he had invited to the meeting declared solemnly and authoritatively that the Bhumij were indeed Kshatriyas.

After this meeting Dinabandhu and the other officials of the Bhumij Kshatriya Association organized a comprehensive reform programme. In every village and district they installed their assistants who had to introduce the reform and supervise its observance. The reform work required money, which was to be collected through voluntary contributions and through the payment of fines for breaches of the new rules. Unfortunately, the leaders of the movement could not withstand the temptation of appropriating for their own benefit the money thus collected. The fines imposed for alleged violations of the new code became a great burden to the Bhumij.

During the years 1935 and 1936 the Bhumij tolerated the activities of the Association, particularly because in 1936 they had an unusually good harvest. This was attributed by the Bhumij to the strict observance of the reform regulations. However, in the following year the rains failed and a severe small-pox epidemic caused many deaths. Now the conservative Bhumij got the upper hand; they declared that the drought and epidemic were the consequences of the omission of the traditional fowl sacrifices during the Sarhul festival, and the prohibition of the group dancing of women. The Bhumij began immediately to revive the rituals and to oppose the reform. When in spring 1937 associates of Dinabandhu went to the village of Khokro to stop group dancing, they were attacked with bows and arrows.

It was rumoured that Dinabandhu's mother, a much respected woman in the district, had expressed her wish that the prohibition on poultry raising should be lifted.

Despite these setbacks, some of the reforms were permanently accepted by the Bhumij, while others were given up. Thus the Bhumij gave up completely the yoking of cows to the plough,

and group dancing of the women, and everywhere employed Brahmin priests and *gurus* for their religious services. But they did not give up drinking rice-beer, and widow marriage and levirate, to which the reform movement was also much opposed.

The process of Hinduization among the Bhumij is thus very selective and affects their culture only superficially. It is extremely doubtful if their claim to Kshatriya origin would be recognized by the high-caste Hindus even did they observe Hindu customs more completely and rigidly. No privileged social group is eager to forego its privileges and to share them with a group so far considered inferior. This is particularly true with regard to the Indian caste system.

The attempts of Bhumij reformers to raise the social status of their community to a higher level will be successful only after generations, and it is doubtful whether they will then care very much about such a prestige. Social status in India may in the near future be measured by other standards than habits of ritual purity.

LITERATURE E. Jay 'Revitalization Movements in Tribal India' *Aspects of Religion in Indian Society* Meerut 1961, pp 299-301, Surajit Sinha 'Bhumij-Kshatriya Social Movement in South Manbhum, *Bulletin of the Department of Anthropology*, vol 8 No 2, Calcutta, 1959 pp 9-32

6 AMONG THE LODHAS

The Lodhas, now in Midnapur District in Bengal, are a small tribe which at one time seems to have belonged to the Munda group, for the Lodhas still possess some old songs in a broken Mundari language. They lost their original culture and became absorbed into Hindu culture but their adjustment must have taken a wrong turn, for they were branded as a criminal tribe. The probable causes of the high rate of crime among them were poverty and social oppression.

In 1933 a Vaishnava hermit, Rajendra Nath Das Brahma Abadhut by name, took up their cause in a spirit of compassionate service and preached to them the old Vaishnava message of the equality of mankind.

He told them that they were the ancient Savaras mentioned in the Hindu scriptures, a people who had attained high spiritual distinction. It would of course be very difficult to prove

scientifically that the Lodhas were indeed descendants of the ancient Savaras, but the Vaishnava reformer intended to arouse their tribal pride. He claimed that for the selfish reasons of some interested groups the Lodhas had been stigmatized as criminal caste and had been treated as such.

The Criminal Tribes Act was revoked only in 1952. But already in 1933 the Vaishnava monk gave them hope that the blot on their honour would be removed if they changed certain objectionable habits and practices. He persuaded them to give up certain disreputable customs like the eating of pork, etc.

With the intention of purifying them and taking away their past sins he organized a big sacrifice (*yajna* or *toma*) in which clarified butter was to be burnt in a sacred fire. He circulated a pamphlet written in Bengali to give notice of the sacrifice to all Lodhas.

But before the reform plans of Rajendra Nath could be realized, he fell sick and died; with him was buried the hope of the Lodhas for an improvement of their lot. It is not likely that another reformer or saviour of the Lodhas will arise either from their own midst or from outside

LITERATURE O. K. Bhowmick *The Lodhas of West Bengal*, Calcutta, 1963, p. 197.

CHAPTER 3

MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS IN MADHYA PRADESH

1 AMONG THE GONDS

SOUTH of Chota Nagpur, in eastern Madhya Pradesh, and spread over a vast area, live over three million Gonds, another Dravidian-speaking tribe. The Gonds too were adversely affected by their clash with superior Hindu castes encroaching slowly but irresistibly on their land. No wonder that tensions arose which led to movements of a messianic nature. However, the pressure from superior cultures made itself felt adversely much later than in Chota Nagpur, Hindu and Muslim invaders began much later to occupy the jungles of Gondwana. Nor have the Gond movements ever become so revolutionary and violent as those in Chota Nagpur.

This is somewhat surprising, for the Gonds are certainly no less fierce and turbulent than the tribes in Chota Nagpur. Moreover, the idea of messianism is not at all strange to the Gonds. A number of Gond sub-sections still possess the myth of a Gond saviour, or culture hero. Though his memory is fading and his worship being neglected, subconsciously at least the Gonds may still be yearning for the return of their old saviour and hero to deliver them once more from a life of misery and oppression.

Present-day Gond reformers who rise up here and there in the Gond community and claim that they have the ability and intention to save the Gonds from their present plight and restore them to their ancient greatness and glory, are going completely different ways from the mythical culture hero of the past.

The modern movements are motivated by the conviction that an improvement of the economic conditions of the Gonds must be inaugurated by a spiritual reform, but the ideal which the modern Gond leaders aim at is the ethical standard as envisaged and propagated by Hinduism, a Hinduism in its old and most orthodox form. In its wake come Hindu customs and practices which modern Hindus have already outgrown and are anxious to forget, but these very customs and practices are being newly introduced into Gond life by reactionary reformers. The 'uplift'

movement in Gondvana is consequently retrograde in its effect; it falls back into an obsolete stage of Hinduism, which the leading minds of present-day Hindu religion and culture have long given up.

(a) *The Gond Culture Hero and Saviour*

A number of Gond sub-divisions have the myth of a Gond saviour or culture hero. His memory is alive today mainly in the southern parts of the Gond country, in Bastar and Adilabad districts. A century ago he was well-known also in Betul, Mandla and Chhattisgarh districts, but today the Gond bards in these regions are silent about him and his memory is slowly dying out and the stories told about him on certain festive occasions are being forgotten.

This legendary hero, priest, prophet, teacher and saviour of the ancient Gonds was called Lingo. His myth and cult have disappeared among many Gond sub-sections, but it is very probable that the Lingo legend was in former times known to all the Gonds and that he is a genuine creation of Gond culture and religion. Lately, however, many Rajgonds have become ashamed of him because he does not tally with the puritanical Brahmin ideal of a hero and saint which these Rajgond reformers have in mind. They consequently discourage the recitation of the Lingo stories and try to suppress his memory completely. They have been successful in this in many regions of Gondvana: B. H. Mehta states that the Hoshangabad Gonds are ignorant of the Lingo myth, nor has S. Fuchs found it in Dindori Tahsil of Mandla District; but fifty years ago the myth was well known in these regions, as Hislop and Trench show.

There can be little doubt that Lingo is a genuine Gond creation: he possesses all the characteristics of a perfect Gond. He teaches the Gonds the arts of hunting and of shifting- and highland-cultivation; of singing and dancing, of playing eighteen musical instruments; he gives them peculiar wedding rites, introduces exogamy and the clan system among them, the peculiar Gond phratries, gives them the Gond gods and prescribes their rites of worship; he institutes the dormitory system, encourages a comparatively free mixing of the sexes and liberal sex relations between the unmarried, while he strictly forbids adultery.

No doubt, the original Lingo legend has suffered numerous additions, interpolations and changes. Hindu interference cannot be ruled out in this. Thus the introductory part of the Lingo myth in the Hislop version is almost certainly a later addition of Hindu origin, as it expresses the strong Hindu insistence on pure food and on bathing so foreign to the Gond mentality.

The myth of Lingo was first discovered by Rev. S. Hislop who took it down in writing from the lips of a Parlihan (Gond bard). Later Sir R. Temple published a full version of the myth with a literal translation. Another version of the Lingo myth was discovered and published by C. G. Chevenix Trench in Betul District. V. H. van der Meulen deals extensively with the Lingo myth in his book *The Murasani Their Gods* while C. von Fürer-Haimendorf relates the same myth with many variations and additions in his monograph on the Rajgonds of Adilabad.

We follow here the Hislop version of the myth, as related by R. V. Russell and Hiralal in their *The Castes and Tribes of the Central Provinces of India* (Vol. III, London 1916 pp. 19-62) because it brings out the salient features of the myth in a short and concise manner.

The Hislop version begins with the story of the origin of the Gonds which is probably a Hindu interpolation because it describes the habits of the Gonds as immoral and filthy. It is related that Parvati, the wife of Shiva, gave birth to twelve scores (lit. threshing floors) of Gond gods. All the Gonds were scattered over the jungle but they behaved from the first like Gonds and not like good Hindus with lamentable results as the author of the story obviously expects.

How did the Gonds conduct themselves? Whatever came across them they must needs kill and eat. They made no distinction. If they saw a jackal they killed and ate it, they respected not antelope sambhar and the like. They made no distinction in eating a sow, a quail, a pigeon, a crow, a kite, an adjutant, a vulture, a lizard, a frog, a beetle, a cow, a calf, a he and she buffalo, rats, bandicoots, squirrels — all these they killed and ate. They devoured raw and ripe things, they did not bathe for six months together, they did not wash their faces properly, they would fall down and remain even on dunghills. Such were the Gonds born in the beginning. A smell was spread over the

jungle when the Gonds were thus disorderly behaved", they became disagreeable to Mahadeva, who said 'The caste of the Gonds is very bad, I will not preserve them'

Mahadeo then determined to get rid of the Gonds. With the help of a squirrel he enticed them into a cave which he shut with a large stone. Only four Gonds were able to escape. They fled away. But Parvati missed the smell of the Gonds that had pleased her and she practised austerities to force Mahadeo to release the Gonds. Mahadeo promised to liberate the Gonds through Lingo, their culture hero and saviour.

The birth of Lingo is told in various versions. The Hislop version relates his divine origin. 'The yellow flowers of the tree Pahandi were growing on Dhawalgiri. Bhagwan sent thunder and lightning, and the flower conceived. First fell from it a heap of turmeric or saffron. In the morning the sun came out, the flower burst open, and Lingo was born. Lingo was a perfect child. He had a diamond on his navel and a sandalwood mark on his forehead. He fell from the flower into the heap of turmeric. He played in the turmeric and slept in a swing. He became nine years old. He said there was no one like him, and he would go where he could find his fellows. He climbed a needle-like hill, and from afar off he saw the four Gonds. He came to them. They saw he was like them, and asked him to be their brother.'

According to other versions of the myth, Lingo was born of the foam that rises over the waters of a whirl pool. Other sources relate that he had parents, but that his mother refused to suckle him and exposed him in the jungle. In the Betul version his father is drowned on the day he was born.

Lingo seems to have a phallic character. Already his name suggests it. The Rajgonds of Adilabad relate that "Lingal" was born with *lingam* marks all over his body. He was called Kugar, because he wore his hair in the style of a Shaivite saint. The *lingam* marks on his body would suggest some likely connection with the Lingayats who wear the emblem of a phallus on a string on their chest.

Lingo was brought up by a saint, and was given a training worthy of one who was destined to become a leader and prophet. Legends maintain that he was a person of blameless character. He was known as *satodhar* (saint), *pen pantyar* (servant of Gods)

and *bhan* (devotee) It was prophesied that he was destined to be a king To achieve royal dignity, he was told by Mahadeo first to go and spend twelve years in penance "Live alone on a lonely hill and play your music in my honour Then you will be Raja and I will give you my daughter as wife But first you must kill the Rakshasa (demon) "

In the Hislop version, Lingo, soon after finding his brothers, began his vocation as culture hero and taught them how to cut down trees and make a field He taught them further how to track deer and to shoot them with bow and arrows

He taught them where to find fire and how to use it Lingo is associated with the discovery of fire in the Bastar legends also In some villages it is said that the first fire to be kindled was that made by Lingo at the original Pus Koling dance

He made musical instruments and was a great pioneer of dancing As Lingo played, the village girls gathered around him and danced The boys too came with their drums They made a Ghotul (youth dormitory) and lived near him, for there were love-charms in his instruments In the Hislop version Lingo entranced a cannibalistic giant and his wife with his music and made them dance At one time Lingo played eighteen instruments at the same time All who heard him were delighted

Certain legends relate that Lingo also discovered the Mahua liquor The story of it is told in a manner almost identical with that in which the Baiga tell of the making of liquor by Nanga Baiga

In the Hislop version the giant and his wife were so pleased with Lingo's music that they offered him their seven daughters as wives, but Lingo refused to marry them and gave them to his brothers in marriage

The narrative seems to imply that Lingo deliberately excited their passions and induced them to make love to him In the Hislop version he sleeps in a swing and allows his sisters in law to fan him, in the Adilabad versions he plays musical instruments and makes them dance but rejects their passionate advances In all the versions Lingo suffers a great deal because he refuses to answer their sexual passions In some versions it is related that Lingo was ruthless and almost cruel in the manner in which he punished his own wives for sexual misbehaviour Lingo did this

to teach the Gonds how to observe marital chastity. In the Ghotuls sexual play was liberally tolerated, but adultery was prohibited.

According to the Hislop version his sisters-in-law took revenge by accusing him falsely of adultery. Lingo was killed by his brothers. But the supreme God who missed Lingo's prayers sent his crow Kageshwar with nectar, and when the life giving fluid was spread over the body Lingo revived. Elwin attributes the story of Lingo's resurrection after his death to an interpolation through Christian missionaries. He obviously means Hislop but he is wrong. Such stories of the death and revival of a culture hero are quite common in primitive mythology.

In the Hislop myth, Lingo, revived by the nectar of Bhagwan leaves his brothers and goes to find the other twelve scores of Gonds who were imprisoned by Mahadeo in a cave. Neither the moon, nor the stars, nor the sun can tell him where they are, but a hermit reveals to him where the Gonds are incarcerated.

Lingo begins to fast, pray and perform austerities. Mahadeo is moved by Lingo's penance and promises the release of the Gonds on one condition. Lingo must pass a test and perform a herculean deed. Lingo passes the test successfully and Mahadeo releases the Gonds.

Lingo prepares a dinner for them, and then takes them to the forest, they build a town in which they settle and prosper. Lingo divides the Gonds into clans, makes the oldest of them priest or Pradhan, establishes the rule of exogamy, installs the Gond gods, prescribes the rites of worship for them and introduces a very elaborate wedding ritual.

Finally Lingo goes to the gods and disappears from the Gond country. In other versions Lingo marries numerous wives and lives ever after amidst the Gonds. His children people the Gond pantheon.

There is no mythical hero who has rendered greater service to the Gond tribe than the legendary Lingo. Yet his memory has died out in many regions of Gondvana. This is probably due to the Hinduizing propensities of the Rajgond reformers who in large numbers wander through the Gond villages preaching Hindu faith and practices. In making the Gonds forget Lingo they make them forget their own native culture and religion.

But the longing of the Gonds for the return of a saviour and leader is subconsciously alive and breaks out in pathetic form whenever somewhere in the Gond country a would be Messiah rises and claims that he will lead the Gonds to happiness and greatness. They listen to him and follow his orders with complete trust and docility until the day of cruel awakening when they are forced to realize that once again they have followed a fake leader and saviour. Disappointed and resigned they return to their life of want and drabness, but with an undying hunger for real and true happiness and a moderate degree of material prosperity.

LITERATURE R. V. Russell and Hiralal *The Castes and Tribes of the Central Provinces* London 1916 vol 3 pp 50-62 V. Elwin *The Murias and Their Ghotul* Oxford 1947 B. H. Mehta *Gonds of the Satpura Mountains* (unpublished Manuscript), pp 397-403

(b) *Messianic Movements*

(i) *Reform Movements* Around 1929 a certain Bhausingh Rajnegr of Balaghat District started such a reform of his caste fellows, the Gonds. His main intention was to convert them to Hinduism. He claimed that Bara Deo, the supreme God of the Gonds, was identical with god Shiva of the Hindus. He maintained that the Gonds had at one time in the hoary past been Kshatriyas by birth and great warriors. This was proved by the fact that in the sixteenth century one of their kings Dalpat Shah had married a Rajput princess, Devi Durgavati who later became famous as a result of her brave fight against the Moghuls. Gondvana was the home of the Gonds where their kings had ruled for many centuries. Their former power could be gauged from the mighty ruins of their ancient forts. But later, the Gond power had declined as they had become depraved because they had gradually submitted to degrading customs such as eating meat and harnessing cows to the plough.

They could regain their pristine greatness only by a radical reform of their present ways of life. Bhausingh preached accordingly the orthodox Hindu rules of a ritually pure life. He tabooed the eating of beef, forbade the sacrifice of pigs and fowls, and the drinking of liquor. Moreover the Gonds should follow in all things the customs of the high caste Hindus and not eat, drink or smoke with members of any other caste, not even with Brahmins.

for no Gond could risk eating from the hands of a Hindu who pretended to be a Brahmin without being it actually. Gond widows should be barred from re-marrying, and Gond girls should be married off before reaching maturity.

Bhausingh secured a large following, and many Gonds accepted his teachings and began to observe the Hindu rules of behaviour. The results of this change in living standards, however, were not altogether happy. It made the Gonds miserable and deprived them of healthy and nourishing food and the necessary stimulants in their hard and drab life.

V. Elwin mentions a Raj Gond reform organization which called itself 'Kshatriya Surajwansi Maha Sabha'—the Great Association of the Sun born Warrior Caste—of Seoni and Mandla. Its programme of cultural reform and improvement was completely negative and consisted wholly in prohibitions. Its propagandists went far and wide forbidding the Gonds to eat beef or even to yoke the cow to the plough, to abstain from pork and poultry, to avoid alcohol and to prevent their women from dancing. When Elwin intended in 1939 to take a group of Gond boys to demonstrate tribal dances at the Tripuri Congress, the Sabha wrote to Gandhi threatening to perform *satyagraha* (a sit down strike) if these children were permitted to give their show. These reformed Gonds were obviously ashamed of their peculiar Gond culture and wanted it destroyed and forgotten.

Another Raj Gond (Hinduized Gond) reformer began towards the end of 1936 to propagate much the same points of reform. He set up his 'court' near Dindori. In his zeal he visited even the villages in the wild tracts of Mandla district. He was always accompanied by a retinue of disciples—one of them a hard-drinking Muslim adventurer—and servants to prove his importance. He also carried large books with him in which—he claimed—the sacred precepts of Hindu religion were written down. Though it was soon evident that he himself did not understand a word of Sanskrit the mere possession of the books gave weight to his words.

He visited all the Gond villages of Mandla district and held meetings in which he urged the Gonds to reform their ways and to adopt the Hindu religion. He gave out that the Government supported his orders and that all those who disobeyed his

instructions would be punished by law. For some time a police sub-inspector accompanied him on his tours and gave him moral support.

He tried to introduce a new Gond religion. It consisted in the worship of the Hindu gods especially of Shiva (Mahadeo), and in the observance of the Hindu ethical precepts. He claimed that the Gonds were despised and exploited by their Hindu neighbours because their manner of living was immoral and despicable and that their only chance of improving their economic and social position lay in the adoption of the superior standards of the high caste Hindus. All fraternizing with members of the low castes and other tribes must stop immediately, children must be married young, widows must be barred from re-marrying, women must be kept in seclusion. They must give up their gaudy, cheap ornaments for the more refined though more expensive jewellery of the non-tribal women. They must dress in Hindu fashion and wear a bodice.

Dancing of men and women together must cease, the Karma dance being especially objectionable. The singing of the immoral *Dadaria (love) songs* was forbidden. Pork and fowl's meat should not be eaten by any Gond and in order to remove all temptation all pigs and chickens should be destroyed forthwith. Cows must never be yoked to the plough as they were sacred. Drinking liquor was an unpardonable sin. All Gonds must undergo the Hindu purification ceremonies and put on the sacred thread of the twice-born Hindus they really were. In support of these instructions the rumour was started that the Government had recently fined a Gond rupees fifty for shooting a crow. How much more would they be fined for killing a chicken!

This reform movement spread quickly through the whole Mandla District many Gonds paid their fee of four annas and had themselves admitted into the Raj Gond caste accepting the sacred thread from the hands of a Brahmin priest with all the restrictions which orthodox Hinduism imposes on its followers.

To enforce the observance of the new caste rules the village community was entitled to impose the following fines: for dancing the Karma the penalty was rupees fifty, the same fine was to be imposed on a Gond caught drinking liquor, keeping pigs would be fined with rupees twenty-five, while a Gond who yoked a cow

to the plough could be fined rupees ten. The reformer declared that the Government would enforce the payment of these fines.

For some time the Gonds observed the new rules and regulations rigorously. But all too soon they found that the Hindu way of life was not for them; their women in particular objected to seclusion and to a restriction of their freedom. Moreover, the Gonds could not afford to keep their women at home and idle. And after a period of abstention the Gonds craved irresistibly for pork and fowl's meat together with a glass of liquor! They also found that they could not live without singing and dancing. What really settled the issue was that the observance of all these irksome taboos did not improve their social status; the Rajputs refused to recognize them as equals in rank or to intermarry with them.

It did not help the cause of the reform that within two years the reformer was arrested and sentenced on a charge of cheating. First in one, then in the other Gond villages the old songs could again be heard in the evenings, and men and women assembled for the dance. Of course, no dancing without a stimulating drink! However, there was now a bitter taste in these enjoyments — the Gonds felt guilty and were ashamed of having failed in their highest aspirations.

Similar reforms were started in other areas of the Gond territory. They all resulted in similar destructive consequences for tribal life and for the ancient culture of the Gonds, while at the same time they failed in getting the Gonds admitted as respected members of the Hindu caste system.

LITERATURE. V. Elwin *The Baiga*, London, 1939 pp 513-14, V. Elwin *The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin*, Oxford, 1964, pp 117-18, S. Fuchs *The Gond and Bhumia of Eastern Mandla*, Bombay, 1960 pp 189-92.

(11) *The Mahua Deo Movement* One such movement was started in 1945 or 1946 in the village Rattanpur in Bilaspur District under rather strange circumstances. The story goes that in the summer of that year a cow gave birth to a calf. The owner tied the cow to a Mahua tree (*Bassia latifolia*). While the cow rested in the shade of the tree a woman came and wanted to rest under the same tree. She beat the cow to make her move out of the shade, but the cow, exhausted after giving birth to the calf,

did not budge an inch from the spot. This made the woman very angry. As she was a witch and in possession of magic powers she cursed the cow which died instantly, killed by the force of the witch's spells.

After some time, it happened that a Hindu holy man (*sadhu*) passed that way and saw the cow lying dead under the tree with its calf lowing pitifully at its side. He proclaimed that he was going to call the cow back to life through the propitiation of his gods. The villagers came running from their huts and when they heard what the holy man proposed to do they built him a small hut near the Mahua tree.

The *sadhu* began his ritual while the people looked on in awe and reverence. After the worship was completed the cow indeed revived. This created a big sensation. Since that day the Gonds began to worship Mahua Deo — the god in the Mahua tree, under which the revival of the cow had taken place. In honour of Mahua Deo the Gonds also took a vow not to drink Mahua liquor (*daru*) though they are passionately fond of it. The Gonds are not quite sure whether the deity of the tree is male or female, in some villages it is a goddess and addressed by the name of Mahua Devi, in others the Gonds worship a male god — Mahua Deo¹.

But this was not the end of it. The Hindu *sadhu* inaugurated a whole new cult which soon assumed the dimensions of a veritable revival movement. It spread mainly in Chhattisgarh and in the adjacent districts which before independence were feudatory states and are mainly populated by Gonds and other aboriginal tribes.

The members of this movement celebrate their worship of Mahua Deo in a very elaborate manner. A certain village is selected and the worship of Mahua Deo (or Devi) arranged for as many days as the villagers can afford for they must bear the expenses incurred during the feast. Usually it lasts nine days. At a suitable spot a hut is erected and a large circle is drawn around the hut. The area within the demarcation line is called 'Deo Ghera' (divine precincts). On various spots within the circle a number of bamboo poles are stuck into the ground. About thirty such poles are erected. Each represents a certain god or

¹ Cf. R. N. Nagu (1962) 1: 29

goddess, each one has his (or her) distinctive place, a flag and the traditional emblem by which the deity can be recognized. The gods are the usual village gods of the Gonds, such as Mahadeo (Shiva), Suriya Deo (Sun god), Nag Deo (Snake god), etc. but some modern deities also appear on the scene, like Bari Bharat Mata (Great Mother India), Chhoti Bharat Mata (Little Mother India), Daruga Deo (God Police Inspector — a powerful god¹), Sipahi Deo (God Police Constable), Jailer Munshu (God Jailer), and a Nadi Deo who is represented by a streamlet, an artificial ditch through which water is made to flow.

The cult is aimed mainly at the exorcism of all evil spirits believed to haunt the whole countryside and to possess human beings. It is these evil spirits who cause all the evils in the world, disease, hunger, misfortune, accidents, mental distress and sin, and finally death. Therefore they must be exorcized before any improvement can be hoped for.

As it is commonly believed that the spirits prefer to possess women the exorcism is usually directed against them. The procedure of exorcism is as follows. The married women of the village — all of whom are suspect — are made to sit down in a row facing one of the gods within the sacred area. The women are told to remove their bangles in order to deprive them of the magic powers which are supposed to rest in their bangles. Now five young unmarried girls who because they are virgins, cannot be touched by evil spirits, holding twigs of the Mahua tree in their hands, walk around the women and call on the god to visit them.²

If any woman of those sitting in the row believes herself possessed by an evil spirit she then begins to tremble and to moan. This is generally accepted as proof that the woman is a witch. At once the door of the hut in the centre of the sacred area is closed so that no evil power may enter it and mingle with the holy force dwelling in it. The women of course get very excited when one of them has thus been exposed as a witch. All are eager to drive the spirit from the woman.

When the excitement has somewhat subsided the exorcism is

² "The association of virgins with the ritual is interesting and their association with the subsequent proceedings is obviously a borrowing from *Tantrism* (Shakti cult) says R. N. Nagu (1962) p. 31.

started First the woman is made to step over Nadi Deo, that is, the streamlet which has been artificially made by pouring water into a ditch A piece of wood is thrown into the running water The woman is asked what object is floating on the water If she answers in a cryptic manner, for instance, that a snake is floating in the ocean, the people take this as a sign that the woman is indeed possessed and that the spirit speaks through her

The woman is then led before the various gods whose emblems are hung up on the bamboo poles Each time the woman is asked in front of a god to reveal the name of the spirit dwelling in her Any answer the woman gives is faithfully noted down by a man accompanying the procession The evil spirit supposedly dwelling in her is requested to leave her If he refuses, one god after the other is invoked to threaten the spirit with his traditional weapon Often it happens that the spirit gets frightened and the woman is released from his presence then and there But if the spirit is obstinate the woman is taken before Daruga Deo, the powerful God Police Inspector! She is tied with a strong rope which is gradually tightened until the pain increases to such intensity that the spirit in the woman feels obliged to disclose his identity He must take an oath on Ganges water and the sacred *tulsi* (basil) plant that he speaks the truth

The possessed woman must now tie her hair in a knot The spirit is supposed to reside now in this knot which is suddenly cut off with an iron knife or sickle For this rite the assistance of Kumbhi Deo is invoked The woman thus delivered from the evil spirit is then taken around to all the gods in the bamboo poles Finally she is generously sprinkled with water and vigorously shaken till she comes to her senses again Usually she is quite unaware of all that has taken place

Sometimes such an exorcism is dangerous and may even lead to the death of the victim In 1957, for instance, such an exorcism took place in the village Silhari near Shahpura in Madhya Pradesh Some days previously the goddess Mahua Devi had been installed in the village and the villagers had been offering water to her for propitiation Thereafter, the women offered water for three days according to the ritual Then the magicians (*panda*) started their witch hunt They began it by playing their flutes, beating drums and dancing before the Devi Then five

virgin girls were called. They joined in the dance but in a separate group, and fell into a trance. As soon as they did so they were placed between the planted bamboo poles. There was a rush of blood to their heads. In this hysterical state they threw a coconut before two women and declared them to be witches. The two old women were made to sit near the sacred fire (Havan Kund). The magicians — priests of the Devi — continued their dance, occasionally tapping the women with iron tongs and requesting them to confess their guilt. In the evening the two unfortunate women were allowed to go home. But the dance and the ceremonies were continued on the following day. A small girl fell into a trance and declared a third woman a witch who had performed black magic on her. That woman too was called from the crowd and ordered to sit near the altar beside the two old women who had been declared witches on the previous day. She was questioned but vehemently protested her innocence.

The drum beating and flute playing continued. The magicians heated iron rods red hot in the fire of the Havan Kund and after applying a little clarified butter (*ghee*) to their palms they handled the hot irons without burning their hands. This was a proof of the magic power of Mahua Devi, they declared.

The three women were tied to the post of Kali Mai (Goddess Kali) and kept there the whole day. At sunset the villagers were asked to go home. But the magicians remained guarding the *three women. They were denied food and water, and kept tied* in such a position that they could neither sit nor stand erect.

At night the relatives of the third woman decided to rescue her early next morning. When the usual ritual started on the next day three young men armed with sticks rushed to the spot and cut the woman loose though the magicians resisted strongly. No one raised a hand for the two other women who were destitute widows without children.

The two old women were kept tied to their posts till afternoon when they confessed their guilt in sheer despair and agreed to show the articles which contained their magic powers. This was supposed to be the heart of one of the boys alleged to have been killed by their black magic. They were released and taken near the river where they pretended to search for the articles of

their magic. As they could not find anything they were brought back and again tied to their posts. By sunset one of the two women had died of exposure. The other was released, but she too collapsed and died soon afterwards.

The magicians wanted to cremate the bodies at once to obliterate all traces of their guilt, but a report was made to the police and the whole history of the crime with its fatal results exposed.

Though normally the practices of the exorcists are less dangerous the incident just described shows that such revival movements may lead to very unhappy results.

This ritual of exorcism and worship of Mahua Deo and the other thirty gods is continued usually for nine days in one village. On the last day a ceremonial dinner is held in which the first fruits of the season are eaten. A part of the rice and of the coconuts offered in worship are taken home and mixed into the grain in the bins and into other foodstuff which is thereby blessed.

When the feast is completed in one village, it may start all over again in another. Thus all villages of the district are in turn sanctified and cleansed of the evil spirits believed to be residing in them.

But the organizers of the Mahua Deo cult are not content with the one aim of driving out evil spirits. They aim also at the ritual purification of the Gonds. They demand consequently from all persons attending the feast that during these nine days they abstain from meat and liquor. During this time they must bathe daily, keep their houses clean and must fast taking only one meal a day. Some of the followers of this *Bhagti* Movement — as the cult is also called — have made the vow to observe these severe rules for life. The worship of the cow is another important part of this cult. Beef-eating is naturally looked upon as a major crime.

The propagators of the Mahua Deo cult have organized themselves into a legal association. They now have a president, a secretary and an executive council. Their aim is the systematic ritual purification of the Gonds from various evil practices. Their way of doing this is certainly much influenced by Hindu ideas of ritual purity and by a Hindu standard of morals. It runs in many points counter not only to the ancient traditions of the

Gonds, but to the more enlightened convictions of modern Hinduism

(iii) *The Raj Mohini Movement* Another Gond movement in the north of the Gond area, in Surguja District, took a different course again and displayed other features. In the year 1901 Surguja District — formerly a princely State — suffered a severe famine. Because of the failure of the monsoon many people and cattle died of starvation or of epidemics. The tribal religious leaders — village priests, soothsayers and witch doctors — performed many sacrifices and killed many animals and poured away much liquor to appease the angry gods and spirits, but nothing helped to bring the much desired rain. In consequence of this failure the people lost faith in their traditional religion and were on the look-out for new and more powerful gods and a more effective ritual of worship.

This new religion was inaugurated by a humble illiterate Gond woman. Her name was Raj Mohini, and she was of the village Govindpur. Originally she came from Grogori, about thirty miles from Govindpur, but after her marriage she began to live at Govindpur, in the house of her husband's sister. Until 1951 she was little known to the people outside of Govindpur. At the time of the famine she was a woman of about thirty five years of age unassuming and quiet. She was illiterate and only much later learned to read and to write a little.

Raj Mohini suffered severely like the rest of the villagers during the famine. She and her family managed to survive by collecting tubers and roots in the jungle. Nevertheless the famine proved a blessing in disguise to her. It made her the leader of an important religious movement.

The story of her conversion is not told by all in the same way. One version relates that Raj Mohini went one day into the jungle to collect fruits and tubers to assuage her hunger. When she failed to find anything edible she felt miserable and started to weep. She was resting on a rock when suddenly she had a vision. She saw a 'Mahatma' (saint) who consoled her and promised her that all her troubles would vanish if she started to lead a pious life.

According to another story, narrated in the official Constitution

of 'Bapu Dharm Sabha Adivasi Mandal' under which name the movement is now propagated, Raj Mohini went on 10 July 1951 to the jungle in search of edible fruits and roots. Not finding anything she lay down on a rock weeping bitterly. Then and there she received enlightenment about the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. This consoled her greatly.

After her enlightenment Raj Mohini sat down on the rock — today her ashram stands on the spot — and refused to go home. She started preaching, advising the people to give up liquor, meat-eating and telling lies. They should all follow the path of truth. In short, she asked them to follow the Hindu religion which she declared was the supreme way of life.

Her husband tried to take her home and stop her preaching, but she refused to obey him. In fact, she broke all ties with her family. For a number of days nobody really bothered about her and few listened to her. Raj Mohini then returned to the village and announced a fast of twenty one days to call down rain from heaven.

When her fast was completed, the rain came and brought with it peace and prosperity. Raj Mohini, however, became a prophetess in the eyes of the grateful people. Gradually the number of her followers increased. The last to accept her prophecies were the village priests, magicians and witch doctors but finally they too were won over.

After Govindpur had been converted Raj Mohini extended her influence. She began to tour the neighbouring areas and on her preaching tours she went as far as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Wherever she went she was received with great enthusiasm and reverence. People were well informed in advance of her arrival and elaborate preparations were made for her official reception. The village streets and lanes were cleaned. Provisions were collected to feast her and to feed her large retinue.

After her arrival prayer meetings were held in which Raj Mohini sang Hindu religious songs. After that she preached. The people who gathered for these meetings in large numbers and listened to her sermons offered her rice and coconuts just as if she were a goddess. Every command of hers was promptly obeyed. At her bidding the Gonds gave up drinking liquor and eating meat. The faith of her followers in her powers was

boundless. She was believed to possess miraculous abilities. It was claimed that the grain which she distributed in handfuls after service (*prasad*), if mixed with the grain in the bins would keep the granary always filled.

At one time the people of Govindpur suffered from water scarcity because there was no tank in the village. Raj Mohini gave the order to her followers to dig a tank. A large crowd of people gathered to dig and by evening Govindpur had its tank. Unfortunately, the diggers struck rock and no spring was found to fill the tank.

At the peak of her movement this simple Gond woman had about eighty thousand followers. They called themselves *bhagats* and had taken the vow to live a pure life that is to abstain from liquor and meat and from telling lies. They were supposed to bathe daily and to wear clean clothes. The house of a *bhagat* was known by a white flag flying on its roof.

However, this large number of followers could not be maintained. In fact the Raj Mohini movement declined considerably for various reasons.

One was that the exaggerated claims in Raj Mohini's miraculous powers soon disappointed many followers. They regarded her as a goddess who could perform miracles and in all their needs and difficulties they approached her for help, but when their prayers were not answered they lost faith and deserted her.

Another reason for the decline of her reputation was the dishonesty of some of her closest helpers and assistants. Raj Mohini was a simple trusting woman and could therefore easily be deceived. One of her closest disciples for instance misappropriated a large sum that had been collected for a temple, a tank and an ashram at Govindpur. The money had been entrusted to his keeping. He had to be dismissed in 1957. Other followers also deceived her and filled their own pockets with the gifts that had been offered to her. Rice and coconuts that had been offered in large quantities to Raj Mohini by her devotees were sold by her lieutenants and the money went largely into their own pockets. When they were dismissed by her for theft they took revenge by spreading evil rumours about her and accusing her of immorality.

Much opposition to this movement came from the non-tribal landlords and money lenders who opposed it because Raj Mohini

preached against forced labour and the high rate of interest demanded by them. The liquor dealers of Surguja also suffered a heavy loss. When the aborigines abstained from liquor the liquor dealers lost their business. These people were very influential and could exert much pressure on the timid tribals. They frightened them into deserting the Raj Mohini Movement.

Another reason why the prophetess found much opposition was that her agitation caused a serious split in the Gond community. The *bhagats* her followers supposed to lead a different and ritually pure life, tended to keep aloof from their unreformed tribal fellows. They not only refused to marry into their families but ceased to eat or to associate with them. This became so serious that families were torn asunder, one member of the family being a *bhagat* refusing to have any dealings with other members of the family who refused to join the Bhagat Movement. This split among close relatives caused great scandal and seriously impaired the further extension of Raj Mohini's influence.

Perhaps the way of living propagated by the prophetess was also too difficult for the Gonds and so many of her followers deserted her and reverted to their more liberal ancient customs, even some of her intimate disciples. Some of those who apparently had remained faithful to her had to be dismissed because they proved to be corrupt and deceiving scoundrels. Ultimately Raj Mohini found herself moneyless and almost destitute. In 1958 there was no one to assist her at Govindpur ashram. Later a tribal student joined her; he is at present her secretary.

However, this simple but sincere woman did not lose courage and abandon what she felt to be her mission. She dismissed all corrupt and insincere followers and formed a new association legally registered as the *Bapu Dharm Sabha Adivasi Mandal* (Association of Aborigines following Gandhi's Way of Life). The aims and objects of this society are (1) to create the feeling of universal brotherhood (2) to preach the principles of Mahatma Gandhi and to perform all kinds of national service (3) to wean the tribals from eating meat and drinking liquor to spread the idea of hygiene and cleanliness to raise their economic standard and to lay emphasis on leading a simple and truthful life (4) to propagate the Hindu religion to sing Hindu hymns (*hava is and kirtans*) (5) to eradicate all social and communal evils.

Raj Mohini has at present twenty-one members in the managing committee of her association of whom five are from Mirzapur District in Uttar Pradesh, the rest are Gonds from Surguja. These members are managing ashrams at various places in Surguja, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Still the number of her followers is at present low and seems to be further decreasing. Those who have remained with Raj Mohini are sincere and staunch devotees; they often come to Govindpur and offer rice and coconuts to the Devi (goddess) as they call her; occasionally they contribute money or free work for her social activities. For instance they constructed an ashram for her at Govindpur.

The main activities at the ashram are prayer meetings in the morning and evening; on Tuesdays and Thursdays prayers are offered also at noon. After prayers the prophetess gives a short exhortation. On feast days like Dassera, Mag Purnima and Chhath Dassera the members of the ashram organize fairs (*melas*). On such days all her disciples gather around her.

The new reforms advocated by Raj Mohini are strongly encouraged by social workers of the Congress Party. They have promised to cooperate in a new scheme of the prophetess which she calls Ansh Dan. It means that each follower of hers has to contribute a certain percentage of his harvest to a fund from which loans are made to the poor at a small interest. Thus the *bhagats* are discouraged from taking loans from the professional money lenders; they should help each other. Raj Mohini also plans a bank for the provision of good seeds and of implements for better cultivation. Thus her movement, once a messianic one, is gradually turning into a tame welfare association.

(iv) *Among the Maria Gonds* Further down to the south of the Gond territory in Bastar and Jaypore Districts — in former times princely States — a similar movement began in 1932. It started with the rumour that a god had descended on one of the mountains of the Eastern Ghats and commanded all men to avoid every thing black: black goats and pigs and fowl should not be kept or slaughtered; clothes, blankets and all umbrellas with any black in them must be discarded together with the use of beads or articles made of aluminium alloy.

The Maria Gonds believed this story and the news spread

in the plains and their expulsion from many forest tracts in the hills was intensified by many petty tyrannies and exploitations on the part of the Forest and Police officials. In 1940 their bitterness had reached a degree that only a spark was needed to bring the brooding resentment and despair to explosion. The explosion was released by the ruthless destruction of some Gond and Kolam settlements in the Dhanora State Forest. This time the Gonds and Kolams in their unequal struggle against the rapacity of the non-aboriginal landlords and the indifference of officials, found a leader who was capable of rallying hundreds of tribals to concerted action.

This leader was Kumra Bhimu of Sankepalli, a village of about five miles from Asifabad. Kumra Bhimu's family must have suffered from the ruthless avarice of the land robbers, for he too was a landless labourer who had failed in every attempt to acquire land as a tenant in his own native village. For just in the area around Asifabad practically all the land of the aboriginals had in recent years fallen into the hands of absentee landlords who had ousted the Gonds and accorded the fields to immigrant cultivators from whom they could expect a bigger revenue.

Bhimu though a Gond had received some education for he could read and write. He seems to have been a man of more than usual intelligence. He was also a *Bhaktal* or *medicineman* of the Gonds who easily fell into trances and became possessed by the divine spirit who prophesied through his mouth.

When Bhimu failed to establish himself as a tenant in his native village he left the plains and settled at Babjheri, a hill village where a dozen Gond families and some fifty Kolam and Naikpod households lived in scattered hamlets round the main settlement. It happened just at that time that the boundaries of the Dhanora State Forest in which Babjheri was situated were being newly demarcated. Babjheri like many other villages was not recognized by the Forest Department as a lawful settlement and the order was given to its inhabitants to evacuate the village. When on the day fixed for the evacuation the settlers were still in the village the forest guards came and simply burned the houses. Most of the affected Kolams and Naikpods dispersed after this wanton destruction of their houses and moved into the neighbouring county (*taluk*) but the Gonds and nine Kolam households

applied for permission to settle at Jhoreghat, a site not far from Babijheri

The minor revenue officials raised no objection, but the Forest Ranger and his guards used this opportunity to extort several hundred rupees from the applicants threatening that unless they paid, Jhoreghat would be burnt down as Babijheri was. Bhumu and his Gonds paid to the forest officers and guards the amount demanded and then started clearing the land for cultivation but after a short time they were faced with new exactions and again threatened with evacuation. Bhumu and four other Gonds then decided to go to Hyderabad and obtain permission for their settlement at Jhoreghat. When they arrived in the capital they could not find the office where they had to make their application. Finally they were given some document in an office and told it was the required permission but on their return to Jhoreghat they found that they had been cheated and, to their great disappointment, the local forest officer insisted on the evacuation of Jhoreghat. The initial payments to the forest officers and the journey to Hyderabad had cost a lot of money and Bhumu and his Gonds had nothing left with which they could make a new start at some other place. Complete economic ruin was their lot if they had to leave Jhoreghat.

They consequently refused to move and Bhumu sent several written petitions to the Forest and Revenue Officers of the District but all his applications remained unanswered. Finally the Forest Ranger sent a party of forest guards reinforced by an armed Arab to carry out forcibly the evacuation of the settlers at Jhoreghat. This party started by burning without previous warning some of the outlying settlements and when the Gonds enraged by the burning of their houses, opposed them the Arab shot at Bhumu and wounded him in the hand. This was too much for the excited people and they fell on the party, gave them a sound thrashing and chased them away.

But the settlers had no illusions about the seriousness of their situation. They knew that their triumph was short lived and that the forest guards and the police would return in a couple of days, arrest them and destroy their settlement. Bhumu in his despair and wounded pride, decided to defy the Government and to resist evacuation with force. He succeeded in persuading several

hundred Gonds and Kolams to support him in resisting the evacuation of Jhoreghat.

The news of his decision spread like wild-fire through the hills and from all sides came the men who had been rendered homeless and destitute by the Forest Department; they had nothing to lose and were burning with resentment against a policy which had deprived them of the land of their forefathers and the means to earn their livelihood as free men.

Their belief in his leadership was strengthened by his claim to supernatural powers. He was supposed to be in direct communications with the deities and to be acting under their guidance. His enemies, the non-aboriginal intruders in the Gond tracts, accused him of having the secret ambition of founding an independent 'Gond Raj,' and so restoring that Golden Age of the Gonds when they had been free and undisturbed, living their own tribal life and ruling themselves. It is not certain that Bhimu really wanted to establish an independent Gond kingdom; no mention of this is made either in the accounts of his Gond followers nor in the letters which he himself continued to write to the officials of the State. In his applications he demanded merely permission to remain at Jhoreghat without the interference of the forest guards, and exemption from plough tax and grazing fees, whose collection was welcomed by the officials as an opportunity to enrich themselves.

However, the Nizam's Government remained adamant and refused to listen to the pleadings of Bhimu. Finally the Taluqdar, head of the District, was sent with a large police force to quell the insurrection and to evacuate the Gonds by force. When Bhimu sent some messengers to the Taluqdar, this man answered with the demand that the Gonds should give themselves up to the police unconditionally. When Bhimu refused to do this, fearing the consequences of such a defeat, the Taluqdar advanced with his force towards the stronghold of Bhimu on top of a hill.

Bhimu's followers were inadequately armed with swords and spears but their leader had encouraged them with the assertion that they would be invulnerable to the bullets of the police. When the police advanced against them, one of the Gonds fired a shot though it hit no one. The police now opened fire and killed Bhimu and ten other Gonds on the spot. Many more were wounded and the rest were dispersed or arrested.

Thus ended the short-lived insurrection of the Adilabad Gonds. Their defeat cast the aboriginals into a state of unrelieved gloom and frustration. They realized that they could not oppose the Government by force, but on the other hand they saw no chance for any relief of their own complete ruin. It was the Government itself that had encouraged the immigration of good cultivators into the fertile plains and valleys of Adilabad District, at the same time a rigorous Forest policy did not allow the ousted aboriginals a new living space in the jungles.

It was through the personal efforts of the anthropologist C von Fuere-Hamendorf that the higher authorities of the Nizam's Government became aware of the desperate position of the aboriginals and took steps to remedy it.

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2 THE SATNAMI MOVEMENT OF THE CHAMARS

One of the most interesting religious movements among the low castes of Central India is the social and religious uprising of the Chamar caste in Chhattisgarh District. Few castes in Upper India are as low and despised as the Chamars. In the distribution of employment no other trade is left to them but the degrading job of skinning dead animals and tanning hides. Some Chamar groups make and repair all kinds of leatherwork, including shoes. However, in the fertile plains of Chhattisgarh there was in the last century a scarcity of labour which benefited the Chamars, by enabling them to gain admittance into the class of cultivators. This step-up in their economic position aroused the burning desire to break the humiliating Hindu caste tradition and to be raised to a higher social rank.

This ambition was fostered in them by Ghasi Das the remarkable second founder and propagator of the Sat-Nami sect — the 'Worshippers of the True Name of God'. Today the sect is

practically confined to members of the Chamar caste, about half of whom belong to the Satnamī sect. In 1911 over four hundred and sixty thousand persons were returned as adherents of the sect of whom all but two thousand were Chamars. These two thousand non Chamar Satnamīs were probably descendants of the original members of the sect in North India and had no contact with the Satnamīs in Chhattisgarh. In Upper India the Satnamīs go back to at least the seventeenth century and have the tradition of a messianic movement.

The Muntakhab-ul Lubab describes the Satnamīs as men who dressed like devotees but carried on petty trade and agriculture. They were not allowed to acquire wealth in any but a lawful calling and would not submit to oppression at the hands of authority.

Once there was a rising which began as a squabble between a Satnamī and a man who was keeping watch over the harvest probably an appraiser. The police interfered but were overpowered and some officials were slain. Finally the fight developed into a rebellion, the whole town of Mewat fell into the hands of the Satnamī rebels. After taking the town they proceeded to consolidate their position by the collection of taxes and the establishment of a post of their own. Swords, arrows and even musket balls were said to have no effect on them; they were credited with magic power and witchcraft. They were supposed to send wooden men on wooden horses as an advance guard into the battle. The Satnamīs then followed them so it was believed and completed the fighting.

The Satnamīs are mentioned in the Chronicle of Aurangzeb. The Chroniclers have little good to report about them. They were obviously prejudiced against them. They state that the Satnamīs are extremely filthy and wicked. In their rules they make no distinction between Hindus and Musalmans and eat pigs and other unclean animals. If a dog is served up before them they do not show any disgust about it. In sin and immorality they see no blame. And further. It is cause for wonder that a gang of bloody miserable rebels, gold smiths, carpenters, sweepers, tanners and other ignoble beings, braggarts and fools of all descriptions should become so puffed up with vainglory as to cast themselves into the pit of self-destruction.

This is how it came to pass. A malignant set of people, inhabitants of Mewar, collected suddenly as white ants spring up from the ground or locusts descend from the skies. It is affirmed that these people considered themselves immortal, seventy lives was the reward promised to every one of them who fell in action. A body of about five thousand had collected in the neighbourhood of Narnul, and were in open rebellion. Cities and districts were plundered.¹³

The Emperor Aurangzeb was obliged to despatch a strong force against them under the command of Radandaz Khan with a Rajput contingent under Bishnu Singh Kachhwaha. After a desperate struggle with inadequate arms and no leadership against a well armed and superbly trained army the rebels broke and fled but were pursued and almost annihilated. After this misfortune the sect suffered a decline and all but vanished.

But in the eighteenth century this sect was revived by a Rajput, Jagjwan Das, born in a village not far from Lucknow in the Bara Banki District in Uttar Pradesh. He died in 1761. Jagjwan Das preached the worship of God under the name "Sat Nam" (True Name) and taught that the Deity is both creator and substance of all things. He conceived of God in popular Vedantic terms, that is, as an infinite and impersonal being void of sensible qualities and without a beginning or end. Jagjwan Das urged that his followers should practise absolute indifference to the world that they should depend on no one and that they should practise implicit obedience to the *guru* (personal religious preceptor). His followers enjoined tolerance, charity, consideration for others, prayer, study, and kindness to animals. He prohibited the use of meat, red lentils (on account of their red colour suggesting blood), of the *brinjal* or egg plant which was believed, probably on account of its shape to resemble flesh, and of intoxicating liquors. As will be seen, the creed of Ghasi Das enunciated subsequently was nearly identical with that of Jagjwan Das, and was no doubt derived from it, though Ghasi Das never acknowledged the source of his inspiration.

Ghasi Das was a poor illiterate farm servant in Girod, a village in Raipur District near the Sonakan forests, at the junction of the

¹³ H. M. Elliot and J. Dowson *The History of India* Allahabad 1964 vol. vii pp. 185-86, 294-96.

Jonk and Mahanadi rivers On one occasion he started with his brother on a pilgrimage to the temple at Puri but he got only as far as Sarangarh What happened at this place is not clear, but both brothers must have received some sort of a religious vision They did not proceed on their journey to Puri, they returned home shouting incessantly 'Satnam' Satnam' It was probably at Sarangarh that Ghasi Das was introduced to the teachings of Jagjivan Das It is possible that a Chamar adherent of the Satnam sect had emigrated from Oudh to Sarangarh and had Ghasi Das and his brother initiated into the sect

Back in his village Ghasi Das began to adopt the life of an ascetic, retiring all day to the forest for prayer and meditation On a rocky hillock about a mile from Girod is a large *tendu* tree (*Diospyros tomentosa*) under which it is said he was accustomed to sit This became later a favourite place of pilgrimage for the Chamars, and two Satnam temples have been built near it though without any idols Formerly these temples were visited annually by the successors of Ghasi Das but at present the head of the sect only visits them in circumstances of special difficulty

In the course of time Ghasi Das became venerated as a saintly character, and on some miracles being attributed to him e.g. the cure of snake bite his fame spread rapidly The Chamars began to travel from distant places to venerate him and those who were in need of help or desired a boon such as the birth of a child, believed that he could fulfil their desires Pilgrims were accustomed to carry away in hollow bamboos water in which Ghasi Das had washed his feet Their relatives at home drank it considering it nectar

Ghasi Das was a man of unusually fair complexion and rather imposing appearance sensitive silent given to seeing visions and deeply resenting the harsh treatment of his caste fellows by the Hindus He was well known to the whole community having travelled much among them he had the reputation of being exceptionally sagacious and was universally respected.⁴

Finally Ghasi Das resolved to give his followers a new code of life For the composition of this he retired for six months to the forests He asked his disciples to expect his return after this time and when the date of his return drew near a vast multitude

⁴ Cf. Chholm B la pur Settlement Report 1888 p. 43

of Chamars from all parts of northern India gathered at Girod to receive his revelation

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On the appointed day in the quiet of the early morning the prophet of the Chamars appeared descending from the rocky height above the village. There he delivered his message from heaven but it was really a mere repetition of the tenets of Jagjivan Das the founder of the Satnami sect of Upper India. Ghasi Das proclaimed the equality of all men and he named himself the heaven appointed high priest of the new faith adding that the office would remain in his family forever. Then he gave new rules to his faithful followers.

The seven precepts of Ghasi Das included abstinence from liquor meat and certain red vegetables such as lentils chillies and tomatoes because they had the colour of blood the abolition of idol worship the prohibition of the employment of cows for cultivation and of ploughing after midday or taking food to the fields and the worship of one solitary and supreme God. The use of *laroi* (*Luffa acutangula*) is said to have been forbidden on account of its fancied resemblance to the horn of the buffalo and of *brinjal* (*Solanum melongenum*) from its likeness to the scrotum of the same animal. The prohibition against ploughing after the midday meal was probably promulgated out of compassion for the plough animals and was already in force among the Gonds of Bastar State. This precept is still observed by some Satnamis and in case of necessity they will continue ploughing from early morning until the late afternoon without taking food in order not to violate it. The injunction against the use of the cow for ploughing was probably a sop to the Brahmins the name of Gondvana having been historically associated with this practice to its disgrace among Hindus.⁵ The Satnamis were bidden to cast all idols from their homes to dispense with temples and fixed prayers but they were permitted to reverence the sun as representing the deity every morning and evening with the ejaculation Lord protect me. Caste was abolished and all men were to be socially equal except the family of Ghasi Das in which the priesthood of the cult was to remain hereditary.

⁵ Some of the Bundela rads in the north of the Province were made on the pretext of being cruades for the protection of the sacred animal which the Gonds used to put under the yoke.

The creed enunciated by the prophet was of a creditable simplicity and purity. However it proved of too elevated a nature for the Chamars of Chhattisgarh. The crude myths which are now associated with the story of Ghasi Das and certain obscene rites which were allegedly practised by the members of the sect furnish a good instance of the way in which religion originally of a high moral order can be rapidly degraded when adopted by a people who are incapable of living up to it.

It is related that one day his son brought Ghasi Das a fish to eat. Ghasi Das was about to eat it when the fish spoke and forbade him to do so. Ghasi Das then refrained but his wife and two sons insisted on eating the fish and shortly afterwards died. Overcome with grief Ghasi Das tried to commit suicide by throwing himself from a tree in the forest but the boughs of the tree bent with him and he could not fall. Finally the deity appeared returning his two sons alive and commended Ghasi Das for his piety at the same time bidding him go and proclaim the Satnam doctrine to the world. Ghasi Das thereupon went and dug up the body of his wife who arose alive saying 'Satnam!'

Ghasi Das lived till he was eighty years old and died in 1850. The number of his disciples was at the time of his death more than two hundred and fifty thousand. He was succeeded in the office of high priest by his eldest son Balak Das. This man soon outraged the feelings of the high caste Hindus by assuming the sacred thread of the twice born and parading it ostentatiously on public occasions. So bitter was the hostility aroused by him that he was finally assassinated at night by a party of Rajputs at the rest house of Amabandha as he was travelling to Raipur. The murder was committed in 1860 and its perpetrators were never discovered.

Balak Das had fallen in love with the daughter of a low-caste Chitari (painter) and married her, proclaiming a revelation to the effect that the next Chamar Guru would be the offspring of a Chitari girl. Accordingly Sahib Das, his son by her, succeeded to the office but the real power remained in the hands of Agar Das, younger brother of Balak Das, who subsequently married the Chitari widow. By her Agar Das had a son Ajab Das but he also had another son Agarman Das by his legitimate wife and

taken to idol worship, and their villages possess stones covered with vermilion, the representatives of the village deities, which the true Satnamis eschew. They are considered inferior to the true Satnamis, and intermarriage between the two sections is largely, though not entirely, prohibited. A Chungia can, however, always become a Satnamī if he breaks a coconut in the presence of his *guru* and declares that from now on he will cease smoking. He then has to give his *guru* a present.

Among the Satnamis there is a particularly select class who follow the strictest set of the creed and are called Jaharia (from *jahar*, essence). These never sleep on a bed but always on the ground, and are said to wear coarse unbleached clothes and to eat no food but pulse or rice.

It appears that in modern times all Satnamis have reverted to idol worship in temples, recognizing the whole Hindu pantheon, and revering especially the Rama and Krishna incarnations of Vishnu.

Several tenets in the doctrine of the Satnamis point to the conclusion that the Satnamī movement is essentially a social revolt on the part of the despised Chamars or tanners. The fundamental tenet of the Gospel of Ghasi Das, as in the case of so many dissenting sects, appears to have been the abolition of caste, and with it the authority of the Brahmins and this is what provoked the bitter hostility of the priestly order.

It has been seen that Ghasi Das himself had been deeply impressed by the misery and debasement of the Chamar community, how his son and successor Balak Das was murdered for the unlawful assumption of the sacred thread of the twice-born, and how in other ways the Satnamis have tried to show their contempt for the social order which brands them as outcasts and serfs of the high-caste Hindus.

For instance, the Satnamis will get into a railway carriage and push purposely against the Hindus, saying that they have paid for their tickets and have an equal right to a place. Then the Hindus are defiled and have to bathe in order to become clean. The Satnamī women wear nose-rings simply to spite the Hindu social order, as this ornament is the traditional prerogative of the high-caste Hindu women. It was also the rule of the Satnamis to reject cooked food from the hands of any other caste than their own, whether Hindus or Muslims but since the great

famine towards the end of the last century this rule has fallen into abeyance. Another method by which the Satnamis show their contempt for the Hindu religion is by throwing milk and curds at each other in sport and trampling it under foot. This is a parody of the Hindu celebration of the Janam Ashtami or Krishna's birthday when vessels of milk and curds are broken over the heads of the worshippers and caught and eaten by all caste people indiscriminately in token of amity. In accord with their ambition to raise their social status is the prohibition of admitting into their community members of any castes which they regard as lower than their own.

A large proportion of the Satnamis Chamars are owners or tenants of land and this fact may have intensified their feeling of revolt against the degraded position to which they were relegated by the Hindus. Though they are indifferent cultivators and have little energy and forethought the Chamars share with the Hindus the utmost fondness for land and the ardent ambition to obtain a holding however small. The possession of land is a hall mark of respectability in India as elsewhere, and the low castes were formerly incapable of holding it. It is apparent that the Satnamis Chamars being proud owners of land or at least tenants feel that they have risen above the condition of mere village drudges and menials and consequently deserve a better treatment by the high caste Hindus.

But for the restraining control of the British police the Satnamis movement in Chhattisgarh might often have developed into a class war. A bitter and permanent antagonism exists between the caste Hindus and the Satnamis in this region and this suppressed ill feeling occasionally burst into open hatred and resulted in fights. The records of the criminal courts in Chhattisgarh hold many cases arising from collisions between caste Hindus and Satnamis several of which are cases of riot and murder. Though on the whole the Satnamis form a loyal and industrious class of the population they carry their traditional antagonism towards the twice-born castes to extreme limits and display an astonishing courage in their struggle for public recognition of their basic human rights. It is to the credit of Ghasi Das that they became at all aware of the existence of these rights.

No reliable information is available about the present position and strength of the Satnami sect in Chhattisgarh

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3 AMONG THE PANKAS

In the *Imperial Gazetteer* of 1881, vol II pp 139-40 W W Hunter gives a short account of a messianic movement among the Pankas of Raipur district, an untouchable caste of weavers and village servants. The movement had many messianic features but was successfully suppressed by the Government.

Around 1860, Mangal, a Panka in Raipur District, gave out that a deity had entered into him. Sitting with a light before him, he received the adoration and offerings of crowds of worshippers. It happened to be the cultivating season and Mangal proclaimed that good men's crops would spring up without sowing. Thousands believed his teaching till finding the revenue falling off, the Native Government arrested Mangal, and committed him to Raipur jail. With that the movement died down.

LITERATURE W W Hunter *Imperial Gazetteer of India* vol II London 1881, pp 139-40

4 A HINDU MESSIAH IN MALWA

After the pacification of Central India by able British commanders the country soon improved much during the thirties of the nineteenth century under the management of efficient administrators installed by the British. Not even the extravagance and mental instability of the various princes and rajas in Central India could considerably impair this steady economic progress.

Only here and there a disturbance occurred. One was caused by a self-styled Hindu Messiah, a headman (*patel*) of a village in Sondwara who passed himself off for an incarnation (*avatar*) of

the Maratha god Kandi Rao⁶ He pretended to have the power of miraculously curing cholera and other dangerous epidemic diseases Somehow he found credence among the people and many adherents flocked to him The new Messiah aimed at raising an army To equip his followers properly he had to levy contributions, both in kind and money, from the surrounding villages He succeeded in extorting considerable sums of money This was brought to the attention of the Holkar and Sindhua Governments in whose territories the new Messiah had started his agitation

The officers of both Sindhua and Holkar were unable to suppress the movement Finally a strong contingent of the Mahidpur cantonment under Captain McMahon, had to be sent against the rebels The latter having confidence in the divine character of their leader and believing him to be invulnerable, boldly advanced to attack the British troops Under the steady fire of the troops their leader fell and when his adherents saw that he had been killed, they dispersed and fled Thus the insurrection was successfully quelled, and no further attempt was made to continue the rising

LITERATURE H H Wilson *The History of British India* London 1858 vol III p 286

⁶ Probably Khandoba a warrior incarnation of Shiva or Mahadeo

MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS IN BENGAL

IN the latter half of the eighteenth and early decades of the nineteenth centuries Bengal was in the grip of severe economic, social and political pressures. Political confusion and oppression, commercial exploitation and extortion and chaos in revenue administration resulted in a vast economic devastation, a decline of industry and agriculture, a shrinkage of the area under cultivation and the occurrence of a dreadful famine that caused untold misery and carried off about thirty five per cent of the population of Bengal. With the loss of political independence the economic and social structures of Bengal were shaken to their foundations.

The Permanent Settlement introduced in 1793 by Lord Cornwallis against the advice of many experts was a Zamindari (landlord) settlement. Through it the British Indian Government was assured of a stable revenue without the trouble of collecting it. But the assessment of revenue was unduly high. The landlords (*zamindars*) burdened with the punctual cash payment of land taxes were armed with summary powers by which they could recover from their tenants the money paid in advance to the Government. Fear of loss and the determination to gain made the *zamindars* oppressive and tyrannical in their dealings with their tenants. Tenants and field labourers had to slave for starvation wages while the landlords grew wealthy and spent the result of their extortions in luxury and pleasure.

The social unrest was caused mainly by the mass conversions of low castes and untouchables to Islam by Muslim preachers who at the same time taught them social equality and fraternity. They insisted that these doctrines were basic principles of Islam. These being the main motives for their conversion to Islam the new Muslims demanded the abolition of untouchability and humane treatment by the ruling classes. These demands were emphatically rejected by landlords and high caste Hindus. Politically the peasantry was exposed to the tyranny of the landlords and petty chiefs whose authority was enforced with the help of the British administration and all too often by their troops.

The messianic movements in Bengal in most cases aroused and

directed by zealous Muslim leaders were revolts of the oppressed peasants against their tyrannical lords and masters. Open revolts broke out when the peasants could stand the oppression no longer. When provoked too blatantly, they attacked their master's house with the sole object of destroying promissory notes, records of unpaid taxes, etc. In the subsequent mêlée those who were thus attacked along with their henchmen often offered armed resistance but the uncontrollable frenzy of the mob brooked no opposition and hence loss of life often followed.

After the suppression of the revolts and the gradual improvement of the people's living conditions these movements subsided and the leaders of the sects concentrated again on their religious reforms. Nevertheless the ideas kept alive among the members of the sects are likely to be put into practice on provocation. It is largely due to the existence of these fanatical Muslim sects that even today Hindu and Christian minorities in this region cannot feel secure. Propaganda in favour of Pan Islamism, Islamic State and Dhariat Rule has not ceased with the establishment of Pakistan and from time to time the Muslim masses incited by these teachings break out into violence, force conversion to Islam on the infidels, seize their property and endanger their freedom, the honour and even lives of their women. The Pakistan Government is frequently restrained in its enforcement of law and order for the protection of minorities because the fanatics obviously find support for their actions in the teachings of the Koran which in spite of all the assurance of bland politicians to the contrary seems to favour an intolerant and aggressive attitude towards non-Muslims. W. W. Hunter was correct when he said that the whole conception of Islam is that of a church either actively militant or conclusively triumphant — forcibly converting the world or ruling the stiff-necked unbeliever with an iron rod.¹

1 THE SANYASI REBELLION

In the second half of the eighteenth century Bengal was almost continuously involved in war. It was not only ravaged by a war of succession after the death of Alivardi but also after that

¹ W. W. Hunter, *Imperial Gazetteer of India* vol. 2, London, 1881, p. 18. Cf. also K. Cragg, *The Call of the Muezzin*, Oxford, 1964, pp. 336-39.

of his son and successor Siraj, and there was frequent fighting against the British invaders by various indigenous armies. These wars naturally resulted in great hardships for the population. Severe famines broke out, as the fields could not be cultivated. The general economic distress and political unrest drove homeless and uprooted people in large numbers to join Hindu and Muslim groups of religious mendicants — Sanyasis or Fakirs — who formed large communities and lived from beggary.²

However, the exhausted land was unable to support such large beggar communities and both Sanyasis and Fakirs found themselves compelled to take by force what would not be given willingly for their subsistence. From 1763 onwards, but especially after the great famine of 1770, they made their raids into Bengal, gaining momentum from the support they received from the starving peasantry, from dispossessed *zamindars* and disbanded soldiers.

The British who gradually took over the rule of the whole of Bengal felt obliged to enforce their administration and to restore law and order to their newly acquired dominion. Thus the Sanyasis and Fakirs came to frequent clashes with British troops. This so-called Sanyasi Rebellion was one of the most formidable that the British had to face, and that almost at the beginning of their rule in Bengal.

By the end of 1772 there was a great upsurge of Sanyasis and Fakirs in the wide belt of country from Rangpur to Dacca and they threatened to sweep away the English power completely. Their fighting qualities were in no way negligible.³ Thus in 1772 they defeated a company of sepoy and killed the commander,

² Usually the Hindu mendicant monks are called *Sanyasis* and the Muslim monks *Fakirs* but often the terms are used indiscriminately for Hindus and Muslims. Sanyasis and Fakirs usually operated separately rarely did they unite to carry out combined raids. Sometimes they fought each other as in 1777 at Bogra. Many Sanyasis and Fakirs entered service as mercenaries under the warring princes.

³ Their valiant leader was for several decades Majnu Shah Fakir. He belonged to the Burhana sect of the Madari order of Fakirs whose monsoon headquarters were at Makhanpur. Majnu Shah and his bands had numerous skirmishes with British troops. He was frequently defeated by them but he always managed to escape. He died in 1787 at Makhanpur. He had able successors in Musa Shah, Cherag Ali Shah and Sobhan Shah and some others who not only led large groups of Fakirs in their depredations but also fought the British troops frequently with success.

a British officer Encouraged by this success different bands of Sanyasis, each comprising five to seven thousand men under able leaders, overran Bogra and Mymensingh Districts They levied contributions from the *zamindars* and looted the houses of those who refused to pay

In 1773 a contingent of troops under a British officer was sent against them by the British Government, but in the attempt to overtake a band of three hundred Sanyasis the detachment suffered a disastrous defeat and was almost completely wiped out Only twelve sepoy managed to escape Further frequent encounters between the Sanyasi Fakirs and the British forces took place all over West Bengal and Bihar, with varying success

The Sanyasis and Fakirs could not be checked by the British and found asylum in Nepal whenever necessary But after 1800 they gradually moved their operations from Bengal and Bihar and probably joined the Marathas in their war against the British

In spite of their depredations the Sanyasis and Fakirs enjoyed the sympathy of the Bengalese population because as religious people they were found worthy of veneration Though the British fought for law and order and tried their utmost to protect the people's property, they were hated as enemies of religion and of the people's freedom

No doubt, the Sanyasi Rebellion prepared the people of Bengal mentally for the messianic movements which were to arise in the near future in Bengal in great numbers It explains also why these movements became so violent just in Bengal and took such a decided aversion to the British The activities of two such Sanyasis who at the same time were robbers Bhawanī Pathak and Devi Chaudhurani have been immortalized by the great Bengali novelist and patriot Bankim Chaudri Chatterjee in his novel *Debi Chaudhurani*

LITERATURE J M Ghosh *Sanyasi and Fakir Raiders in Bengal* Calcutta 1930

2 THE PAGAL PANTHIS

The northern portion of the district of Mymensingh in East Bengal enclosed by the mighty river Brahmaputra and the Garo Hills was a naturally protected area About two hundred years ago it was occupied mainly by two tribes the Garos and Hajongs The Garos are believed to be members of the great Bodo family

who are said to have entered India from the North East, and to have spread in successive waves not only over the valley of the Brahmaputra, but even beyond it to the hills of Tipperah. At the time of their immigration the Garos were practising shifting cultivation (*jhum*), burning a jungle plot and sowing into the soil fertilized by the ashes. The Hajongs came originally from the Himalayas. They were more Hinduized than the Garos worshipping Durga or Kali.

In the days of the Moghul rule the country lying between the Brahmaputra and the Garo Hills was under the domination of powerful *zamindars* (landlords), who only paid a nominal tribute to the Imperial Government and enjoyed a position of semi-independence. One of their tasks was to protect the fertile plains from the depredations of the hill men but they were more intent on enriching themselves with trade cotton being a valuable article of export from the hills. They acquired great wealth by the economic exploitation of the simple tribals who were ignorant of the money value of the crops which they exchanged at the weekly markets for goods which they required but did not produce themselves.

This situation so profitable to the landlords was disturbed by preachers of Islam who in the Muslim period found this enclave quite favourable to their work of proselytizing the backward cultivators of the region the Garos and Hajongs. One of these preachers must have been an outstanding personality because he was particularly successful in his conversion work and able to start a movement that has survived to the present time. It is called the sect of the Pagal Panthis.

The founder of the Pagal Panthis was a Derwish or mendicant called Karam Shah a Pathan by caste and origin who had settled about 1775 in the Susung *pargana* (county). He soon gained an overpowering influence over the aboriginal tribes the Garos and Hajongs inhabiting the region below the Garo Hills. His doctrine of truthfulness and the equality and fraternity of all men had a tremendous appeal to them. The followers of Karam Shah who were noted for their honesty and love of truth were on that account stigmatized by the more sophisticated people — as the British Collector of Mymensingh reported in 1802 — as Pauguls (simpletons).

The Hajongs and Garos living in this part of Mymensingh had submitted to the British rule in the hope of escaping the tyranny of the Zamindar Mahendra Narayan of Goalpara District. In 1788, however, this Zamindar prevented the Garos from coming down to the markets (*hats*) in the Sherpur *pargana* which they used to frequent in order to barter their cotton, *agur* wood, and musk in return for other commodities and even occupied some villages of the Sherpur *zamindars*.

Sabatu Shah, eldest son of Karam Singh, taking advantage of this situation and of the hold of his father over the hill tribes, sent a petition to the Collector of Mymensingh for permission to take possession of the extensive tract of land to the north-east of the Sherpur *pargana* and inhabited by the Abri Garos, on condition of the payment of *jumma* (landtax) after deducting collection expenses. The Collector recommended the application strongly to the Board on the ground that the petitioner, a religious teacher of the sect known as Pagal Fakirs had his followers among the Garos, and that the lease of the land if granted, would open the country to trade and commerce and civilize the Garos. But the Board did not approve of this policy of setting up an intermediate authority between Collector and hill tribes. In 1802 the application was rejected. The British administration was justifiably suspicious of any middlemen coming between the revenue officers and the tribals, for it was more than likely that even a religious teacher would feel tempted to behave like a land lord of the type of Mahendra Narayan whose levying of illegal dues had been the cause of so much friction and even of riots.

When Karam Shah died in 1813 he was succeeded by his second son Tipu. This young man was full of energy and plans. He entertained great political and religious ambitions. While preaching the sublime doctrines of equality and fraternity to consolidate the brotherhood of the *Pagals* or *Bhai Sahibs* he intensified his hold over the Garos and Hajongs of 'Gird Garo' (Land of the Garos) who were much embittered by the exactions of the *zamindars* of the Sherpur *pargana*.

This inhospitable tract of country was held by the *zamindars* at a nominal revenue. The decennial settlement papers show that it had an asset of twelve rupees only, but the *zamindars* collected over twenty thousand rupees by levying illegal impositions.

of various kinds and so exasperating the tenantry of Sherpur and surrounding areas. The tenants were subjected to contributions on every occasion and on any possible pretext. In the year 1824, for instance, during the Burmese war, impositions were levied by the *zamindars* on the plea of reimbursing themselves for contributions which had been demanded from them by Government. The highly taxed tenantry naturally looked upon Tipu as their deliverer.

Tipu, who had never abandoned the ambitious design of his brother Sabatu to gain possession of this whole tract of land, began to collect a band of armed men and acquired wealth by plunder and rapine. He now came forward as the leader of the oppressed peasantry and declared a no-rent campaign against any demand above four annas per *kud* (one and a third acre).

Cleverly making use of the real grievances of the cultivators, he incited them to open revolt. In January 1825 his agitation finally bore fruit and he was able to lead an infuriated armed mob of about seven hundred men, who attacked and looted the houses of the *zamindars* of Sherpur who fled in panic for shelter to the bungalow of the British Deputy-Collector at Kaligany. Meanwhile Tipu moved on to Gar Janipa, an ancient fortified place, where he assumed royal powers supported by the help of a number of officers he had appointed, but the power of the 'Royal Court of King Tipu Pagal' was very short-lived. He was soon captured by the force of the Deputy Collector. This officer soon released him, possibly in consideration of the justice of the cause Tipu had taken up, but Tipu, the self-styled saviour, abused this leniency, carried on desultory warfare and in 1827 was again apprehended.

The Government was now determined to put an end to these agrarian troubles. The Board directed the Collector to make a reasonable settlement of the rents of the 'Gird Garo' and of Sherpur and *lappa* Satsika. The Collector, Mr Dunbar, seems to have made an equitable assessment of the rents. He also provided for the summary settlement of all disputes arising from tenures, rents and arrears in the court of his Deputy Collector at Sherpur.

But the revolutionary spirit, once roused, is not easily suppressed and this summary settlement which kept the people of the plains engaged in litigation failed to satisfy the followers of Tipu. They

consequently organized rebel parties under two lieutenants of Tipu, one operating from his headquarters at Goalgaon Batajore on the western border of Sherpur *pargana*, and the other from Nalitbari. In a joint operation the insurgents sacked the town of Sherpur, plundered the *zamindari* centres and in April 1833 set fire to the police station. The joint Magistrate of Mymensingh who arrived at Sherpur was surprised at his bungalow, but with a force of police and camp followers he repelled the insurgents and pursued them towards Nalitbari. There the rebels took a determined stand and began to attack the *zamindars* offices. The Magistrate of Mymensingh on receiving intelligence of the disturbance applied for military help to restore order. The insurgents had taken complete possession of the country between Sherpur and the Garo Hills and were levying contributions from the peasants. Their main body consisted of about three thousand men armed with spears, bows and arrows, swords and a few matchlocks.

Military operations on a large scale were decided upon. One party under Captain Shiel proceeded to the west against the group at Batajore, and the other under Lieutenant Younghusband went against the other group of rebels at Nalitbari. Finally the two parties had to unite to meet the furious attack of the formidable gathering of rebels whose number had swelled to four or five thousand, fighting with desperate bravery.

After very harassing operations the rebel strongholds were destroyed, their houses burned and they were driven back into the hills. The operations lasted from March to April 1833. Only then did the Pagal insurrection break down.

However, the desire of the Garos for independence did not completely die out. In December 1902 the Indian Magistrate in charge of the Goalpara sub-division, where the Pagal Panthis had been active seventy years earlier, reported that a large number of Garos had assembled at the Dalgoma steamer ghat with the object of establishing Garo rule. Afterwards it was found that some ambitious men had tried to stir them up. They had already collected large sums of money with the ostensible object of establishing some shadowy and unjustified claims to the possession of the Habraghat *pargana*. The leaders of this agitation had posted warnings in the villages not to pay rent to the *Bijni zamindars*.

The Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara immediately proceeded to the spot with a strong body of police and arrested the ring-leaders. Without leaders, the Garos did not attempt to offer resistance. The whole agitation subsided quickly.

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3 THE FARAIZIS

Contemporary with the Pagal Panthi insurrection was another movement which had its centre in the District of Faridpur. Daulatpur village, in Faridpur District, was the birth place of Haji Shariat ulla, the founder of the Faraizi or reformed sect of Mohammedans which spread rapidly throughout the whole eastern Bengal during the middle of nineteenth century.

The Faraizis are properly a branch of the great Sunni division of Muslims, and in matters of law and speculative theology they profess to belong to the school of Abu Hanifa, one of the four authoritative commentators on the Koran. Their essential difference from the general body of Sunnis consists in their rejection of traditional custom. They declare that the Koran is the complete and sole guide to spiritual life, they therefore call themselves Faraizis or followers of the *faraz* (plural of the Arabic word *farz*), the divine ordinances of God alone. Historically they represent a Puritan reaction against the corrupt condition in which Islam found itself in Bengal at the close of the eighteenth century, and in this as in other respects bear an analogy to the Wahabis of Arabia.

There can be no doubt that the vast majority of Muslims in the delta of the Ganges and Brahmaputra are descendants of the low Hindu castes and the aborigines who willingly embraced Islam at the time of the Mohammedan conquest in preference to remaining outcastes beyond the pale of exclusive Hinduism. But though they became converts in outward profession they still retained many of the superstitious customs and beliefs of their former life and joined in social merry makings with their Hindu fellow villagers. In particular they used to observe the Durga *puya* festivities and worshipped other deities and spirits of the Hindus.

Haji Shariat ulla was the son of a Julaha (weaver) of Faridpur. At the age of eighteen he went for *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca). He remained twenty years in Arabia where he joined the Wahabi sect. He returned to Bengal in 1802 as a good Arabic scholar and a skilful disputant. Soon he began to disseminate the teachings of the Wahabi sect in the districts of Faridpur and Dacca.

The reform inaugurated by Haji Shariat ulla was a protest against the pagan practices among the new converts of Eastern Bengal. He preached a return to the simple habits and the pure monotheism of the Koran. In particular, he objected to the squandering of large sums of money on wedding festivities and to the exclusive employment of certain persons to perform the rites of circumcision. The articles of faith on which he chiefly insisted were the duty of the holy war (*jihad*), the sinfulness of infidelity (*kufr*) of introducing rites and ceremonies into worship (*bida'at*) and of giving partners to the one God (*shirk*). Externally a Faraizi could be recognized by the peculiar fashion of wrapping his loincloth round his loins without crossing it between the legs so as to avoid any resemblance to a Christian's trousers and by certain ostentatious modes of offering prayers with peculiar genuflexions in public by raising their hands to their ears when praying and by pronouncing Amen in a loud voice and not in an undertone like the followers of Abu Hanif.

Shariat ulla prohibited for his followers the performance of Hindu rites and participation in Hindu worship especially in the Durga worship the preparation of *tazias* (models of the tombs of Hasan and Husain) and the praying to *pirs* (saints) and prophets. He prohibited the ceremony of joining hands which was customary at the initiation of a disciple because that ceremony implied a complete submission of the pupil to the religious preceptor which Shariat ulla strictly forbade. He demanded instead from every one of his disciples a sincere repentance for past sins and a declaration of his intention to lead a more righteous and godly life in the future.

The introduction of a peculiar dress and a special ritual for reciting prayers differing from that of other Muslims was a conscious attempt by Haji Shariat ulla to set his followers apart from the rest of the population as a selected and specially organized

social group. At the same time it was intended as a return to the original purity of Islamic Faith and an endeavour to reform the religious and moral life of his converts and thus make them worthy of a better economic and social status in life. It will be seen that Shariat-ulla's son Dudu Miyan, when the Bengali landlords were unwilling to grant economic and social concessions to his followers decided to seize such rights by force and by the sword.

Shariat-ulla also held that India was Daru l harb (the 'mansion of war', i.e. enemy country), where the observance of Friday prayers was unlawful and the waging of war against the 'infidels' was a religious command. Such an assumption has serious implications for orthodox Mohammedans.⁴

Though personally a saintly man — according to Muslim standards — Shariat-ulla's zeal for Islam seems to have led him to persecute the Hindus in his district. A letter of a Hindu published in a Bengali periodical describes in detail the outrages perpetrated on the Hindus by Shariat-ulla's men, and refers to the breaking of images of Hindu gods, the desecration of Hindu places of worship, the killing of cows in Hindu houses, etc. as a regular feature. The writer apprehends that the Hindus will suffer grievously if Shariat-ulla with his band of twelve thousand Muslims is not controlled at an early date. Subsequent events justified the apprehensions of the writer.

The simplicity of Haji Shariat-ulla's religious convictions, his personal piety and exemplary life seem to have cast a spell over the simple peasants of the district. In a short time he was able to gather round him a band of devoted followers — disgruntled peasants who had grievances against their landlords and idle artisans who had lost employment since the importation of foreign goods. The landlords, moneylenders and traders naturally opposed the Haji's activities and he encountered much opposition.

⁴ Modern followers of this sect deny that they hold India Daru l harb but it is impossible to say if this is really the case. It is therefore quite likely that followers of the Faraizi and similar sects feel in conscience bound to force Hindus and Christians residing in Bengal to be converted to Islam and to ill treat them if they refuse. Many such cases of forced conversion and of intolerant outrages have recently been reported from the areas in Bengal where these sects are still active. They have finally resulted in mass emigrations from East Pakistan. Up to the first half of 1964 over 400,000 refugees have crossed the border to escape the persecution of the Mohammedans.

and abuse, but he achieved the remarkable result of uniting the lethargic and passively suffering Bengal peasants in the resuscitated faith and to instil into them a new vigour and resilience. They now felt bold enough to resist the exactions of the *zamindars* which was the most pressing evil from which they suffered. There was also a general feeling at that time that the real object of the Faraizi Movement was the expulsion of the alien rulers and the restoration of Muslim power.

Shariat ulla found the rapid spread of the Faraizi Movement very gratifying and worked tirelessly for its further expansion. His exertions wore him out prematurely and he died in 1837. After his death his followers held a meeting in which they elected his son, Mohammed Mushin better known as Dudu Miyan, as their spiritual leader.

Dudu Miyan born in 1819, had by an early pilgrimage to Mecca qualified for his career as leader of the Faraizis. After his return he devoted his time and talents to the spread of his father's doctrines adding some new ones of his own. Among other things we are told that he insisted upon his disciples eating the common grass hopper, which they detested because the locust was used as food in Arabia.

As leader of the Faraizis Dudu Miyan was even more successful than his father. He was more politically minded and gradually began to neglect the teaching of religion and to concentrate more on claims for social equality and the evils of economic exploitation. His audience was spellbound by a preacher who boldly asserted in the face of haughty landlords and tyrannical officials that all men were equal and that no man had a right to levy taxes on God's earth.

The Pir (saint) as Dudu Miyan had himself addressed, became the symbol of royal and religious authority to his devotees. In order to keep his subjects under close surveillance he partitioned East Bengal into circles and appointed a deputy to each whose duty was to keep the members of the sect together, make new proselytes and collect contributions for the furthering of the objects of the association. In each village he established a court presided over by experienced old adherents of the faith and he punished any Mohammedan, Hindu or Christian who without referring

matters first to him, dared bring suits for recovery of debts, etc in the Government court Making his headquarters at Bahadurpur, he administered summary justice, settled their disputes, and forced Mohammedan peasants to join his sect If they refused to join he had them beaten, excommunicated from the society of the faithful, and their crops destroyed But for his followers he acted as their arduous defender against the landlords, protested against the unjust levy of cesses and became their unfailing source of help He even defrayed the cost of litigation against the *zamindars* and sent his own body guard to frighten them

However his unbounded influence was without doubt occasionally misused to the extent of encouraging and supporting his peasant devotees to oppose even the just and legal impositions of the landlords, and of openly inciting them to acts of violence These lawless activities brought him into frequent conflict with the Government which, to all accounts, was openly partial to the *zamindars* and indigo planters.

Thus privileged class of landowners and planters united to concerted action against Dudu Miyan and brought him repeatedly to court accusing him of misappropriating the large funds which were collected through public subscription for his private use and of many high handed and tyrannical actions Thus Dudu Miyan was charged with plunder in 1838, committed to sessions for murder in 1841, tried for trespass and for unlawful assembly in 1844, and for abduction and plunder in 1846, but it was found impossible to induce witnesses to give evidence against him On each occasion he had to be acquitted In July 1857 Dudu Miyan was finally arrested after repeated complaints from the *zamindars*, and confined in Alipur jail as a state prisoner This arrest broke his proud heart and he died at Bahadurpur in 1860 or 1862 In the last years of his life his influence had declined owing to the indignities heaped upon his person during the arrests and his dealings with the police

Dudu Miyan left no capable successor but three of his sons, together with a nephew, set themselves up as leaders and directed the movement in the spirit of their father But they could not prevent a further dwindling of numbers Only in Faridpur and

Bogra are the members of the sect still fairly numerous, while in the other districts they have decreased to one per cent of the Mohammedans in East Bengal. However, its chief doctrines seem to have been adopted by the Ahl-i-Hadith sect which in later times has kept alive the missionary spirit of Islam and the zeal for the purity of the faith without, however, mixing religion with politics.

At the present time the majority of Faraizis are cultivators of the soil though not a few earn their livelihood as traders being specifically active in the export of hides. All alike are reputed for the strictness of their moral life, for religious fervour and the faithful promotion of the common interest of their sect. On the other hand, they are intolerant and bigoted and their contempt for the opinion of others has been the cause of numerous affrays and disturbances which have brought them frequently to the notice of the local authorities. It is claimed that every family sets aside a handful of rice at every meal for religious purposes. The rice is collected by the local head of the community, and it is suspected that the proceeds are used for the promotion of *Jihad* . The present headquarters of the sect are at Sibchar.

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4 TITU MIYAN

While Dudu Miyan was carrying on his activities at Faridpur and the adjoining districts another Mohammedan reformer rose at Barasat near Calcutta. He was Mir Nassir Ali better known as Mir or Titu Miyan of Chandpur (now in East Pakistan). He was the son of a respectable farmer and bettered his position by marrying into the family of a small landholder, but he was of a restless and violent disposition and refused to settle down to a peaceful routine life. For some time he earned his livelihood in Calcutta as a boxer, and afterwards enlisted in one of the bands of strong men with which the Bengali landlords surrounded

themselves at that time to adjust their family quarrels and boundary disputes. This occupation finally landed him in jail.

After his release he made a pilgrimage to Mecca where in 1822 he met Sa'iyid Ahmad, the future Wahabi leader of North India, and became his disciple. In 1827 after his return to Barasat he began to preach Wahabi doctrines to the weavers and other low caste converts to Islam in Jessore and Nadia districts among whom he secured a large following.

His reformatory zeal alienated the members of other Muslim sects (Hanifa, for instance), and of course the *zamindars* with whom Titu Miyan came in conflict because they exploited his followers as they did the rest of the population. When Krishna Rai, a wealthy landowner, imposed a tax of two rupees and eight annas on each of his tenants who was a follower of Titu Miyan and another landowner locked up one of his followers in his private jail, matters came to a climax.

Titu marched with a band of his followers to the village of that *zamindar* and committed unspeakable atrocities. They murdered a Brahmin priest, killed two cows and sprinkled their blood on Hindu temples and committed numerous outrages on Hindu life, property and religion. In these outbursts of Muslim rage lies concealed more than pure Wahabi fervour for Islam. It is hatred for the Hindus. For many Muslims are dealers in skins and hides and are looked upon with hatred and abhorrence by the Hindus because they lay impious hands on the carcase of the holy cow, and profit by its death. Now the Muslims are in a position to take revenge!

But even the Muslims who refused to join their sect were molested and insulted and many shops were plundered. A village in Faridpur District was sacked in open daylight because one of the inhabitants refused to accept Titu Miyan's divine mission. In another District a second village was plundered and a mosque burned down. In still another village they sacked the house of a wealthy Muslim who refused to join them and forcibly married his daughter to the head of their band.

Intoxicated by this first violent and successful raid carried out in 1831, Titu Miyan decided to continue and extend his revolt against the Hindu landlords. The rebellion spread like wildfire in East Bengal. This encouraged Titu and he declared that the

British Raj had to go too. He proclaimed sovereignty over India to be the hereditary right of the Muslims who had been superseded by the British in clear opposition to the law of God and of His prophet Mohammed. Foreseeing the retaliation of the British Government, Titu constructed a stronghold at Narkulbariah in the Twenty-four Parganas and surrounded it with a stout bamboo stockade.

Similar activities were carried out in other places by the Maulavis, as the followers of Titu Miyan were called. The British administration moved slowly, and for a considerable time the population was at the mercy of the rebels. The Hindus offered practically no resistance and for some time Titu Miyan ruled over the three districts Nadia, Faridpur and Twenty four Parganas. The contemporary Bengali papers painted a lurid picture of the panic which prevailed in this region during the insurrection.

The panic increased when the followers of Titu Miyan took prisoner the manager of the Hooghly Factory with his whole family and released him only after he had given an undertaking that he recognized the Wahabis as rulers in India and promised to serve them faithfully. The rebels issued proclamations and called on the authorities and *zamindars* to acknowledge their supremacy and to supply them with provisions.

At last the British administration decided to intervene. A contingent of the Calcutta Militia under an English officer was sent to suppress the rebellion, but it was routed with heavy casualties. This made the British Government realize the gravity of the situation and a better equipped military expedition with artillery was sent against Titu Miyan and his Maulavis.

The clash occurred at Narkulbariah. The rebels fought a pitched battle with the British troops. It is said that the British soldiers at first fired a blank volley at Titu's men to frighten them but it had the opposite effect. When no injury was done to any man, Titu told his followers that he had eaten up the shots and they could not harm them. Then the real battle began. Titu's men gave a good account of themselves and fought bravely. However, they could not prevail against the better armed and well trained troops of the British. Titu was killed in action, while his lieutenants with three hundred and fifty followers, were taken prisoner. The main assistant of Titu, Ghulam Rasul, was later

sentenced to death as a rebel and one hundred and forty of his comrades were condemned to various terms of imprisonment. The movement collapsed.

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MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS IN ASSAM

ASSAM is probably the State in India with the most heterogeneous races and cultures. The river valleys and plains of Assam received Hindu culture and religion at a comparatively early date, this was replaced and superseded by Buddhism for some centuries, but Hindu culture returned and reconquered the whole territory in the early Middle Ages. The hilly tracts remained longer in the exclusive possession of the wild tribes who would not submit to Hindu or Buddhist influences and retained their tribal cultures and religions largely into the nineteenth century.

With the introduction of Hinduism into the Assamese plains came the caste system with its gradation of people into the twice-born high-castes, the low castes and the untouchables. This social gradation was intensified and accentuated by a corresponding economic gradation, introduced by a feudal system and favoured by the Hindu caste system. The low castes and untouchables — tenants, labourers and slaves of the privileged superior classes — did not accept their low economic and social position without a fierce struggle. Proof of this is the large scale conversion of especially the lower classes to Vaishnavism which at its first introduction into Assam preached its gospel of human equality before God and man. The revolutionary spirit which very largely prompted these conversions and which was strongly opposed by the privileged ruling classes gave vent to various movements and revolutions of a strongly messianic character.

These religious, social and political upheavals in which the various Assamese dynasties played a very prominent and sanguinary role began soon after the introduction of Vaishnavism in Assam and lasted well into the nineteenth century. They came to rest only after the British annexed Assam and forced peace and order upon a war-torn country after a fierce struggle.

The British occupation of the Assam valley was not without many disturbances. A series of insurrections took place, the chiefs of the powerful tribes were strongly averse to any domination or control imposed upon them by foreigners. However, these

revolts were one after the other defeated by the British, and round about the middle of the nineteenth century various tribes in Assam and in the adjacent North-Eastern Frontier Agency came more or less under the influence and control of the British administration.

However, the risings continued even then: the Syntengs revolted in 1860 and 1862; the Garos became restless in 1852 and 1857; and again in 1872; the Lushais and Kukis made raids in 1860, 1871, 1888, 1889-90 and in 1892. The British colonial officers had their hands full trying to pacify the tribes, to restore order and to punish the raiders.

Soon after the annexation of these mountain ranges, Welsh Presbyterians and American Baptists established Christian missions in these areas. The Welsh missionaries began in 1841 among the Khasis and in 1894 among the Lushais, and made many converts. The American Baptist Mission began in 1877 among the Garos, and had a fair measure of success. Later on Catholic missionaries appeared on the field. Since that time the life of the tribes under Christian mission influence has changed considerably. Head-hunting has been stopped, raids and robberies have ceased, slaves have been freed, and the hillmen have learned to submit to a higher authority than their own chiefs and village councils.

The Christian converts among the tribals have adapted themselves to order and discipline, but no doubt, by gaining order and security, they have lost much of their former *joie de vivre*. For not only have such customs as warfare, head-hunting, slave-raiding, etc. been stamped out, but many harmless activities of the tribals have been forbidden, due, partly, to a short-sighted and puritanical mission policy. Thus alcohol has been completely banned among the (Protestant) Christians, dancing has been discouraged, the youth dormitories have been closed down, the beautiful artistic dress of the aborigines has been exchanged for drab, western fashions, and missionaries even insisted (for hygienic reasons) on cutting off the long hair of the boys.

No doubt this suppression of their traditional customs in the face of their indomitable spirit of independence created some messianic movements among the Christianized tribes of Assam

Other tribes had such movements because they were oppressed economically and politically by neighbouring tribes and by the people of the plains including the Bengalis. Ultimately all these movements came to clash with the British administration which had pledged itself to the maintenance of peace and order in these regions as well as in the whole of India.

The revolts against the British were not inspired by any patriotic feeling for Indian independence. This is proved by the fact that the Naga tribes especially have been fighting with the Indian troops almost continuously since India achieved independence.

Though promised independence by Gandhi himself if they insisted on it the Naga tribes were forcibly incorporated in the State of Assam in 1947. The stark realities of Indian defence left the Indian politicians no other choice. It is unfortunate that the Nagas do not recognize this and keep on fighting helped in their guerilla war by the protective cover of their primeval forests and rocky hills and supplied with arms first by the Japanese when they left these regions after the close of the Second World War and — allegedly — later by the Pakistanis.

In 1963 they were granted a limited autonomy as Nagaland. With that they will have to be satisfied for their struggle for complete independence has no chance of ever being realized. If they cast off Indian domination they will automatically fall under the influence of the Chinese round the corner for whom the three hundred and seventy thousand Nagas are no match and who would be delighted to annex Nagaland on the hills dominating the access to the Assamese plains. It is to be expected however that even oftener than in the past messianic movements will arise among the Naga tribes frustrated as they are in their aspirations for political independence and gradually brought under the influence of the Indian national culture which is almost as different from that of the Nagas as Western culture.

1 AN EARLY VAISHNAVA MESSIAH IN ASSAM

Assam the Kamarupa of the Indian Middle Ages received Hindu culture and religion at an early date. Hinduism was introduced into Assam mainly in its tantric form. The fundamental creed of Tantrism or Shakti cult consists in the worship of the female

aspect of the divine nature, i.e. the "procreative aspect of nature as manifested in personified desire" This religion placed the emphasis on bloody, even human sacrifices and on magic practices

The priests of the largely occult rituals were the Brahmins who on the strength of their office and knowledge of the rites dominated religion and society in Assam. When in the early centuries of the Christian era Buddhism was introduced in Assam it was not strong enough to purify religion from Tantrism. On the contrary, Shaktism entered and permeated Buddhism and diluted it to such an extent that gradually the Assamese Buddhists drifted back to their old tantric Hinduism.

The Brahmins regained their supremacy over the people and re-established caste hegemony and untouchability in Hindu society. All those who did not live up to their standard of religious knowledge and practice were considered low caste and even untouchables. The Brahmins saw to it that learning and the practice of religion were reserved to them. They alone could perform the rites of worship correctly, the low castes were not even allowed to enter the sacred precincts of the temple (*mandap*) where the figure of the Deity and the offerings were kept. The Brahmins also reserved the learning of the religious texts and ceremonies for themselves, exceptions were granted only to the ruling families.

Along with this religious and social oppression of the low castes went a severe economic exploitation the low castes being reduced to life long drudgery and serfdom for the benefit of the religious and political rulers. The non Hindu hill tribes however, remained altogether outside the pale and were not found worthy of any consideration by the proud masters of the Hindu faith.

In the middle of the fifteenth century this feudalistic and static civilization was breaking down under the onslaught of the Koches and the Muslims. A new age was being inaugurated time-honoured beliefs and customs had to give place to beliefs and customs better suited for the changing pattern of religion, culture and race.

1 In fact, there is a celebrated shrine in honour of the genital organ of the Mother goddess at Kamakhya in the Gauhati area. A natural fissure conical in shape and reddish pink in colour oozing water with a reddish tinge during the rainy season was obviously the reason for the establishment of the cult on this spot.

The man who recognized this and subsequently became the great leader and prophet of a new religion in Assam was Shankara Deva. He was born in 1449² at Batadroba in Nowgong in a Kayastha (Sudra) family. He belonged to a family of Bhuyans, feudatory immigrant chiefs from Kamota. He claimed that an ancestress of his, queen in a small kingdom north of the Brahmaputra, gained the love of the Sun god, and that he was therefore a descendant of the Sun god.³

In the days of his youth Nowgong was still a centre of Hindu orthodoxy. A Kayastha by caste, of princely blood and a Shakta by religion and family tradition, Shankara Deva was educated in the Sanskrit school of Nowgong by the most learned scholar of the time, and instructed not only in Sanskrit language and the sacred texts of Hinduism, but in singing, in music and dance, in dramatic performance and painting. His proficiency in these arts stood him in good stead during his religious conversion work.

At the age of thirty-three, Shankara Deva went on pilgrimage and travelled all over northern and central India for twelve years. He made himself acquainted with the political and social movements in India, and it was during this time that he adopted the Vaishnava creed which appealed to him for its sincere love and devotion to God and service to mankind. He decided to propagate this creed among his countrymen in Assam.

When he arrived at home he found that the country had undergone a great change for the worse. The independence of the Bhuyans in Nowgong area was threatened by the Koches from the west and the Kacharis from the east, who again were in constant conflict with the Ahoms in the north.

Shankara Deva found the situation hopeless and decided to migrate to the Ahom region on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. There he started his religious movement for the sincere love of God and for the service of mankind. He preached that sacrifice and magic are futile without love and devotion to God, and insisted on the equality of all human beings in the eyes of God. He taught, under strong protest from the Brahmmins, that

² This date is probably thirty or forty years too early since Shankara Deva died in 1569 a date which is fairly certain he scarcely can have been born in 1449.

³ Such stories are very common in India.

even the so-called Mlechhas or depressed classes had a right to an honourable place in the worship of God

In his famous *kirtans* (devotional songs) Shankara Deva says, for instance "The Mlechhas who eat dogs purify themselves by singing the name of God The Chandala⁴ who only sings the name of Hari will properly execute the function of a sacrifice"

In another hymn he teaches 'That Chandala at the tip of whose tongue there is the message of Hari is to be placed in the highest estimation 'One is an ignorant who vilifies a Chandala who has sung the name of Hari'

This was an extraordinary and revolutionary doctrine in Assam Not only did Shankara Deva teach that an untouchable assumed human dignity and the right if he loved and served God, to be treated as the equal of a high-caste man he also preached to the untouchables that heaven was open to them too and that they were not excluded from salvation He used to describe in the most vivid colours of his poetical soul the Vaishnavite heaven (Vaikuntha) awaiting them after death

Shankara Deva's faith was not yet affected by the powerful criticism which was later introduced into Vaishnavism and led in many places to a decline of religion and morality Shankara Deva though a monk was not a celibate He married twice and begot three sons and two daughters

Shankara Deva's creed consisted essentially in 'Namkirtan' i.e. keeping the memory of God in mind and heart, and expressing one's love and devotion to God externally by acts of praise and worship His religious ritual differed much from that of the traditional Shakti cult in Assam, he abhorred all pomp and display

His religious meetings had frequently the character of revival meetings full of emotion and lyrical effusion For his followers Shankara Deva composed his *Kirtan Ghosa*, a book of deeply intellectual and religious verses

He tried to bring home the tenets of Vaishnavism to the people through poetry, song and drama In fact, Shankara Deva inaugurated a new literary blossoming in Assam and found many imitators who followed his lead and sometimes surpassed him in the artistic value and intellectual height of their creations This

⁴ Member of a depressed class.

is true, for instance, of Madhava Deva, the most beloved disciple and successor of Shankara Deva

Shankara Deva himself was a poet of considerable talent. He was also a composer of songs, a dramatist, a scene-painter, a playwright and a stage designer. The idea of the theatre as a medium of popular religious education and the propagation of his creed must have come to him during his tours of the Vaishnavite art centres in Orissa and Bihar. It is said that he loved to paint scenes of Vaikuntha, the Vaishnavite heaven, on vast canvasses.

The lower Hindu castes in the Ahom country flocked in large numbers to Shankara Deva's prayer meetings and had themselves initiated into the Vaishnava sect. They were strongly attracted by Shankara Deva's teaching of human equality and found themselves treated by the Vaishnavas with a respect which they had never experienced before. They now felt that they belonged to a community in which high and low were treated alike, where all treated each other as brothers and equals. They thus saw in Shankara Deva their deliverer from their economic oppression and social degradation under the Brahmins and Ahom rulers, and hoped that Shankara Deva would inaugurate a new era in Assam in which they too would have a claim to honour and wealth, and a heaven after death.

While Shankara Deva also attracted high-caste disciples, he never refused admission to any one because he belonged to a low or impure caste. He even admitted members of the aboriginal tribes into his community, such as Nagas, Miris, Garos, and untouchable castes like the Haris and Doms, and the Bhutias. Moreover, he raised members of these tribes and castes to be leaders (*atoi*) of small groups of his followers. Thus Damodar, a Bhutia, became *Atoi* of the Bhutias, Gobinda Garo among the Garos, Narottam Naga among the Nagas, and Narayan Miri among the Miri followers of the Deva. He even admitted Muslims (Javanas) into his sect, like Jayahari, who became *Atoi* of his Muslim converts.

No wonder that Shankara Deva had extraordinary success with his religious exhortations. He converted thousands in Assam to his brand of Vaishnavism. His reputation rose to such heights that he was looked upon — and still is — as an incarnation of

God This fact was in itself a revolution in the Hindu mind, for the Brahmins had always denied the possibility that God could be incarnated in any member of the lower castes.

The Brahmins watched his revolutionary religious and social activities with disapproval and opened a crusade against him. Finally they went to the king of the Ahom country, probably Subenpha or Supimpha and urged him to put a stop to Shankara Deva's preachings. They accused him of heresy and of rebellion. They complained that Shankara Deva did not sacrifice to the gods, he did not observe the caste rules, and he treated the Brahmins with disrespect. Hence to tolerate him in Assam was tantamount to a condonation of sacrilege and to a fostering of anarchy in the field of religion and society.

This argument of the Brahmins moved the king (who was an ardent Shakti worshipper) against the revolutionary preacher. He hunted Shankara Deva from place to place, and when he could not apprehend him, he persecuted and punished his disciples.

In Cooch Behar, in the meantime, a king had been raised to the throne who possessed a more modern outlook. He was Nar Narayan who had received his education at Benares. Surrounded by a galaxy of highly educated and cultured men he gave a new lease of life to the political, social, religious and literary activities in his kingdom. In 1546 he took it upon himself, as the protector of Hindu culture, to lead an expedition against the Ahom king, but his army was defeated and he was forced to retreat.

Shankara Deva who had hoped that with the advent of Nar Narayan the opposition in the Ahom country would break down was much disappointed about this turn of events and decided to leave the Ahom country with his followers and to accompany the defeated army to Cooch Behar. He travelled by boat down the Lohit and settled at Barpeta. King Nar Narayan received him with open arms.

After some time the Brahmins created trouble even in Cooch Behar and stirred up the populace against the Vaishnava missionary. The king convened a synod in which the great reformer was allowed to explain and defend his creed. He was able to confound the Brahmins with his logical arguments. King Nar Narayan became his staunch and loyal supporter. It is said that the king

held many discussions with Shankara Deva, some say that he even wished to become his disciple, but that the Vaishnava saint refused this honour. Some historians report that Nar Narayan married Shankara Deva's niece Kamala Priya, but others aver that it was his brother Chilarai who married her.

With the help of the king, Shankara Deva was able to convert many thousands of the population to Vaishnavism. Practically all the low caste people joined this religion of love and devotion to God. Under the kings Suhungmung and Suklenmung the disciples of Shankara Deva were able to return to the Ahom country and to make many converts. They also founded many monasteries (*sattras*). Many common people, and even some of the highest officials, openly joined the ranks of the Vaishnavites or Mahapurushias, as they were also called.

Shankara Deva died in 1569. Legend says that he reached the age of one hundred and twenty years, but that is not very likely. Probably the year of his birth (1449) is incorrect and far too early.

In the subsequent years the Vaishnava community became very powerful through the monasteries (*sattras*) founded by Shankara Deva. The masses looked upon the heads of these monasteries (*mahants* or *gurus*) with great reverence, in some cases the allegiance due to a monarch was considered to be of lesser importance than the respect to which a religious head was entitled. Some of the monasteries were established under the patronage of kings and nobles who were themselves the disciples of one Gosain (head of a monastery) or other.

The Gosains grew in wealth and power through the tithes they received from their disciples, and through gifts, endowments and grants made by kings and nobles. Their food and dress and their way of living remained simple as befitting religious disciples of their great master, but the furnishings they used in their audience chambers and prayer halls, the magnificence of their processions when they went out, the receptions held in their honour, and the numerical strength of their devotees and attendants bespoke their royal pomp and power.

Some of the more important Gosains were invited by the kings to remain at the capital and to assist their royal disciples with advice and guidance in the administration of the country. In a few cases they successfully intrigued against one king in favour of

another They were even responsible for the death of one Assamese king (Udayaditya)

Thus the movement of Shankara Deva, which started as a movement with many typical messianic features, consolidated into a powerful religious sect giving its disciples religious consolation, the hope for happiness in the other world, a modest amount of self respect and a feeling of belonging to a powerful fraternity in their home country

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2 THE MOAMARIAS

Shankara Deva, the gentle and cultured religious reformer, tried throughout his life to achieve his novel and revolutionary aims and objectives by peaceful means. In fact, through his powerful personality and the royal favour of Nar Narayan he succeeded in a large measure not only in the field of religion, but in politics. His successors consolidated this political position and increased their power, slowly but with steady aim.

In one branch of the Vaishnava sect which Shankara Deva planted so strongly and widely in Assam the revolutionary spirit inherent in Vaishnava doctrines broke out in violent and terrible forms. Indeed, the whole history of the Moamaria branch of the Vaishnavas of Assam is filled with stories of rebellion and fighting accompanied by the utmost ferocity and pertinacity.

The Moamarias did not start the fight, they were rather the victims of a peculiar situation in Assam. Towards the latter part of the Ahom rule, Assam became the battleground of two conflicting religious forces. Shaktism and Vaishnavism. This conflict led to internecine strife and turmoil which for a long time reduced the country to extreme suffering. The Ahom rulers were fervent followers of Shaktism, while the lower and much oppressed classes of the Assamese population preferred Vaishnavism. When the Ahom rulers, incited by the Brahmins, increased pressure on the Vaishnavas to abandon their creed and to return to Shaktism and the Durga cult, the Vaishnavas finally broke out in revolt. The core of the rebellion were the Moamarias.

The Moamaras were a religious sect founded in the sixteenth century by a Sudra disciple of Shankara Deva, a religious teacher in Upper Assam, Anirodh by name, a Kalita (stone-worker) by caste. Some historians assert that he was the descendant of a noble Nepalese family. One of his ancestors emigrated to northern Lakhimpur where he became a powerful landlord. His father, it is said, was married to Shankara Deva's cousin.

What made Anirodh break away from Shankara Deva's sect and found his own, was a celebrated book on magic which is said to have originally belonged to Shankara Deva. It had been inherited by the founder's disciple, Madhava Deva. Madhava Deva's disciple, Gopal Deva, took possession of the book allegedly without Madhava Deva's knowledge. This led to a quarrel between the two. But Gopal Deva later suffered a similar theft — his disciple Anirodh stole the book from him. This led to a parting of the ways which became final.

Anirodh's sect became known as the Moamaras sect. This designation is said to be a nickname given to the original disciples of Anirodh, who lived near a lake where they caught large numbers of a fish called Moa. Others aver, however, that the name is derived from that famous book on magic or *Maya* which Anirodh stole from Gopal Deva. Most probably the name stems from the Bodo word 'Mei' which means 'man,' and *Maria* i.e. Morans, a tribe who formed the bulk of the sect. The Morans lived in a small area, in the present Dibrugarh sub-division, later their homeland became known as *Mahtaka* or *Motak* (from the Sanskrit *Mastaka* — headland). The Morans had been subjugated by the Ahoms but revolted when the Ahom power declined. Their desire for independence was intensified by religious resentment, for as Vaishnavas they were intolerantly treated by the Shakti worshipping Ahoms.

Doms, Kacharis, Haris and Chutiyas and other members of low social rank also became disciples of Anirodh. It seems that the more turbulent among Shankara Deva's adherents joined Anirodh's branch. They strongly objected to the supremacy of the Brahmans and refused to submit meekly to the traditional oppression by the Ahom rulers and their Brahman priests. They resented especially the religious intolerance of the Shakti worshippers. Naturally, as heretics and low castes they became

the object of the special scorn of the orthodox Hindu hierarchy.

The terrible persecution which they suffered under the Ahom rulers only resulted in a closer unity among themselves and under their head, the Moamaria Gosain. Their ultimate ambition was to gain freedom and independence in their own homeland where they could lead a happy life and follow their religion without interference from outside. Their fight for these objectives certainly assumed a messianic character.

In 1722 it happened that the chief queen Phulesvari of the weak Ahom king Sib Singh (1714-44) terribly outraged the religious feeling of the Moamaris. The queen, like her husband, was completely under the influence of the Brahmins and very zealous in the worship of Durga. When she heard that the Sudra Mahants (religious leaders) of the Vaishnava persuasion refused to worship Durga, she ordered several Gosains, among them the Moamaria leader, to be brought to a Durga shrine and there the Vaishnava leaders had to attend the sacrifice which they abhorred and, finally, to suffer the distinguishing marks of the Shakti sect to be smeared upon the forehead with the blood of the victims. The Moamaris never forgave this insult to their spiritual leader and swore revenge.

They started secret night meetings where people of all tribes and castes assembled and, after the observance of the religious rites of Vaishnavism as preached by Shankara Deva, renewed their vow of fraternal unity. They demonstrated the sincerity of their purpose by eating and drinking together. Sometimes the food and drink were of the same type as that taken by soldiers on the battle-field. In this way they kept alive their resolution of revenge. However, they had to wait more than fifty years before their vow could be fulfilled.

It happened in 1769, soon after Lakshmi Singh had become king of the Ahom country. Lakshmi Singh had as chief minister Kirti Chandra, an upstart, very powerful and jealous of his rank. One day when this man was travelling with the king in the royal barge, the Moamaria Gosain Astabhujia happened to be standing on the bank. He saluted the king, but failed to take any notice of the chief minister who was infuriated by this slight to his honour and he abused the venerable head of the Moamaris in the most insulting manner.

Soon afterwards Nahar, the chief of the Moran tribe and a disciple of the Moamaria Gosain, incurred Kirti Chandra's wrath by bringing elephants for the king directly to the royal palace without first paying his respects to the chief minister. To teach the Moran chief his manners, he had him seized and severely beaten, and ordered his ears to be cut off. The unfortunate victim of ministerial pride went straight to his preceptor and invoked his aid.

The Gosain had not taken any revenge when the chief minister had offended him. But in order to punish the cruel treatment of the Moran chief he raised the banner of rebellion. He raised an army from among his 800,000 followers and appointed his son Bangan as its commander. At the head of this army he entered Namrup. The inhabitants received him with great enthusiasm and all of them became his disciples. They belonged mainly to the Moran and Kachari communities. His son Bangan assumed the title of King of Namrup. King Lakshmi Singh's elder brother, who had been passed over in the succession in favour of Lakshmi Singh, was induced to join the rebels, who promised to raise him to the throne. Many other banished princes followed his example. When the king received news of the rising, he sent men to seize Bangan, but they were themselves taken and put to death. The insurgents then advanced to Tipam.

The first skirmishes with the king's troops were not successful for either party. Only in October 1769, when a Moran named Ragma became chief minister of Bangan, things brightened up. Ragma succeeded in defeating the royal troops and even captured the king and his whole court. The king was confined in the temple of Jaysagar. His chief minister, who had offended the Moamaria Gosain, was first chained hand and foot in the elephant yard and then killed along with his sons. His wives and daughters were distributed among the Moamaria leaders. When the elder brother of the captive king hastened towards the capital to take the promised throne, he met with tragic disappointment. Ragma not only broke his promise but had him executed as a member of the hated dynasty.

Ragma wanted Bangan to be king but his father, the Moamaria Gosain, forbade him to accept the offer and chose Ramakant, a son of the slighted Moran chief Nahar. Two other sons of Nahar were appointed Rajas of Tipam and Sarang, while the other leaders

of the insurrection were rewarded with various high offices of state, and took possession of the houses belonging to those whom they had supplanted

Ragha himself retained the post of chief minister which he had assumed, and took into his harem the wives of the deposed king as well as the widows of his predecessor Rajesvar, including a Manipuri princess who had first been married to Rajesvar Singh and had been inherited by Lakshmi Singh. Coins were minted in Ramakant's name, but the real power was vested in Ragha, who disposed of all important public business

The Moamarias, exulting over their great success, overreached themselves. They compelled all the Gosains of Upper Assam to acknowledge the spiritual supremacy of the Moamaria high priest (who in their eyes was only a low caste man¹). They also extorted large sums of money from them under various pretexts. This high handed behaviour offended the population, though for a long time they took great care not to show any overt opposition, but it was obvious that the people did not recognize the Moamarias as their true rulers since they were of low caste. This enraged Ramakant, the royal usurper, and he took council with his friends and decided to put all the old officers to death and even to execute the king

Ramakant's decision aroused the active resistance of the adherents of the old regime. Moreover, among the Moamarias themselves dissensions broke out and in April 1770, on the New Year's day when Bihu dancers were showing their feats before the new ruling party in the palace yard, the Manipuri princess plunged her sword into the neck of her recent paramour Ragha from the back and thus gave the sign for a general massacre. The Bihu dancers joined by the other adherents of the captive king killed Ramakant's father and other of his relatives and many of his officers. Ramakant himself escaped for a time. He and his satellites had over confidently allowed their followers to disperse to their homes, so that their supporters were few in the capital and were easily overpowered by the counter revolution

Lakshmi Singh was liberated and reinstated as king. He lost no time in taking his revenge and persecuting the Moamarias with great severity. These severities soon resulted in a fresh rising, in which the Chungis of Namrup were the ringleaders. An expedition

Dhanesvar Katakı many thousands, including women and children, were put to death, with the result that within a short time the Moamarias were reduced to one-eighth of their original strength.

However, this terrible massacre did not break the spirit of the remaining Moamarias. Even the widows of the massacred rebels who had fled to the north bank of the Brahmaputra formed themselves into a fighting unit under the leadership of one Harihar Sannyasin in his hermitage on the Bandardewa Hill, and marched against the Ahom king. In the ensuing battle the revengeful women played their part so courageously that they inflicted a crushing defeat on the disorganized and discontented Ahom army. Later, however, the Mahant (leader) was caught and blinded, and three of his followers were fried to death in oil. In the extreme east the Morans broke out in rebellion under a man named Badal Gaonburha, but were suppressed without much trouble.

This abortive rising was followed, in 1786, by a more serious revolt of the Moamarias on the north bank of the Lohit. An expedition which was despatched to quell it was cut up, after which many other malcontents flocked to the rebel camp. Fresh troops were sent against them, but they too were defeated in an engagement. All the troops the king could muster against the rebels were defeated and the Moamarias advanced slowly towards Rangpur. The capital was taken.

The king fled panic stricken to Gauhati, accompanied by most of his officials. Only the Burha Gohain Purnanand, the chief minister and a few others remained behind and organized resistance. Garhgaon was sacked by the rebels. They burned down the palace and destroyed many of the neighbouring villages. The common people, finding themselves unprotected, began to throw in their lot with the rebels.

The Moamarias installed one Haoha on the throne, but in 1793 he was replaced by one Bharat who claimed descent from the ancient Naraka dynasty — an ancestry that would make him more acceptable to the people.

But for the Burha Gohain all would have been lost. However, *this man was still undaunted and carried on the struggle* against the Moamarias. Whenever he received reinforcements, he assumed the offensive inflicting several minor defeats on the rebels, but they were as stubborn as he, fighting with desperate

courage for their survival, and always succeeded in making good *their losses*. Finally they were repulsed with heavy losses in an attack on a fort on the bank of the Desoi river. This reverse appears to have disheartened them, and for some time they abstained from regular fighting and resorted to guerilla tactics. They harassed the inhabitants of the tract held by the Burha Gohain in constant raids, especially at night when small bodies would pass up the Dhansiri and Kakakan streams, plunder some village on the banks, and disappear again before they could be intercepted.

The people gradually lost heart and would gladly have accepted the Moamaria supremacy, but for the untiring efforts of Purnanand, the Burha Gohain. He alternately coaxed the people by gifts of food and clothing and coerced them by inflicting severe punishment on those who gave in to the rebels. But if their sufferings were great, their condition was still far better than that of the people living in the realm of the Moamarias. There the burning of villages, the looting of supplies and the wanton destruction of crops led to a *terrible famine* rice was not obtainable, and the sufferings of the people were so great that many abandoned their children. Even people of the highest castes, it is said, were reduced to eating the flesh of cows, buffaloes, dogs and jackals. Some roamed about in the jungle, devouring wild fruits and roots, while others fled to the Burha Gohain or to the neighbouring hill tribes, or even to Bengal.

During these operations, several petty kings set themselves up over various parts of the country and ruled with the help of the Moamarias. Meanwhile, Gaurinath, the Ahom King, migrated from one place to another, and his numerous followers irritated the villagers with their constant demands for supplies and with acts of oppression. The discontent thus caused found vent in new risings.

King Gaurinath appealed to the neighbouring Rajas for help, but they were only too glad to see him involved in difficulties and refused to come to his assistance. The Manipuri Raja alone marched with four thousand men infantry and five hundred horse to Nowgong, but near Rangpur he was defeated by the Moamarias. Many were killed in the fight and more in the pursuit that followed, and the martial ardour of the Manipuri Raja was so

completely quenched that he lost no time in hastening back to Manipur

Finally Gaurinath had to appeal to the British. Since the marauders appeared to come from British territory, it was incumbent on the British Government to restore order and to restrain the rebels. In September 1792 six companies of sixty sepoy each were sent to Goalpara under the command of Captain Welsh. The latter's mission was not without danger, as his detachment was small and had to face a desperate and ferocious enemy. His action could easily be misconstrued as political interference. Captain Welsh consequently remained in Goalpara and did not venture into Assam.

But in November 1792 King Gaurinath again asked Captain Welsh for assistance against the Moamarias. They were indeed his most formidable enemies, and the king could not maintain his authority against them. The British were, however, reluctant to interfere in the internal affairs of the Assamese ruler.

Towards the close of the rainy season, 1793, Captain Welsh got permission to restore Gaurinath's authority in Upper Assam by crushing the Moamarias. An advance guard was sent up the Brahmaputra to Kohabar. A letter was sent to Pitambar, the Moamaria chief to attend the assembly of notables summoned by Captain Welsh. Attempts were made to suppress all refractory chiefs ravaging the districts between Kohabar and Nowgong such as Sinduri Hazarika a leader of the Moamarias.

Meanwhile the Moamarias suffered their first defeat in a skirmish with the British troops under Lieutenant MacGregor. Captain Welsh wrote another letter to Pitambar, the chief Moamaria leader, asking him to submit to Gaurinath and to assist the British Government in restoring peace and order in Upper Assam. The letter however, could not be delivered to Pitambar. Lieutenant Irwin was thereupon sent towards Rangpur to pacify the Moamarias by conciliatory measures, if possible or to capture the town, provided that his force was adequate for the venture. At a distance of about twelve miles from Rangpur he was furiously attacked and surrounded by a large body of Moamarias, but he defeated them and advanced towards a bridge over the Namdang river, about four miles from Rangpur. Here he was joined by Captain Welsh. Rangpur was occupied on 18 March 1794,

without any opposition, as the Moamarias had already evacuated the town. They left large quantities of grain, cattle, furniture and treasure in their hasty retreat.

Still the Moamarias were not yet defeated. They continued their depredations. A detachment was sent against them at the request of the king and his ministers. It was reported that many of the rebels were anxious to avail themselves of the king's offer of amnesty but were prevented from doing so by their 'self created chiefs'.

When the British Government decided to recall Captain Welsh and his troops the Moamarias at once resumed their aggressive policy. Early in May 1794 they crossed the river Dikhu and plundered some granaries in Rangpur. Captain Welsh who had not yet left chased them twice and dispersed them.

In May 1794 Captain Welsh finally left Assam and in July reached British territory. The immediate effect of the Captain's departure was disastrous for the people of Assam. The Moamarias at once resumed their old practices, made incursions into the country in every direction and plundered and laid waste all the land with the most extreme ferocity. The people were utterly demoralized, forsook their fields and habitations and fled to strongholds for shelter. Gaurinath was again compelled to leave Rangpur which was constantly threatened by the Moamarias and finally was occupied by them.

The condition of the country at that time was miserable. Where the Moamarias held sway whole villages were destroyed and the inhabitants, robbed of all their possessions, were forced to flee the country or to eke out a precarious existence by living on wild fruits and roots and the flesh of unclean animals. Where Gaurinath had power, on the other hand, those who belonged to the Moamaria community were subjected to all manner of persecution and barbarities in the same measure.

In 1821, however, Assam passed under Burmese rule and the Ahom king was kept busy with other political troubles. The Moamarias managed to keep a precarious independence in the small tract between the Buri Dihing and the Brahmaputra.

In 1826 Assam was annexed by the British. Motak, the present Lakhimpur district, was then the country of the Moamarias. It was left under the rule of their chief, styled Bar Senapati, who had

to acknowledge the supremacy of the British Government and to supply three hundred soldiers in time of war. In 1835 the obligation to supply troops was commuted to a money payment of one thousand and eight hundred rupees a year. The Bar Senapati died in 1839, and as his successor refused the terms offered him, the district was annexed by the Company. With that the Moirania movement came to a rather inglorious end.

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3 AMONG THE LUSHAIS

In the last decades of the nineteenth century revival movements with hysterical symptoms made their appearance among the Lushais recently converted to Christianity. In some places these movements assumed dangerous dimensions.

The Lushais have certain mental qualities which make them accessible to revivalism. They are emotional, have an inferiority complex and are to a degree exhibitionists. Moreover, revivalism is a recurring phenomenon distinctive of the Welsh form of Presbyterianism. Certain members of the congregation who easily fall into ecstasy are believed to be visited by the Holy Ghost and their utterings are received as prophecies.

This heritage from Welsh Protestantism which was introduced in Assam by the missionaries received a characteristic Lushai hue in certain Houses of the Lord as the churches of the Lushais are called. After long and tiring prayers and songs a member of the congregation felt that the Holy Ghost was going to visit him (or her). Usually it was a woman or girl who felt thus privileged. She stood up in the congregation while the others made room for her and intensified their prayers and singing. The performer commenced moving her feet and perhaps started uttering incoherent words. The tempo of the shuffling dance increased while some man took a drum and began to beat a rhythm on it. The dancer perhaps a woman or young girl ever more energetic in her movements, stomach wobbling, eyes dilated, gradually moved towards the climax into a hysterical swoon. It is reported that in some cases of these excessive emotional outbursts sexual liberties were taken and some of the dancers helpless in their

ecstatic state were disgraced. The mission authorities no doubt censured such behaviour severely, but they could not control it in the outlying districts which could be visited only on rare occasions.

The village Kelking became rather notorious in the general revival atmosphere. The movement here was inaugurated by two Lushai elders who were obviously rogues and hypocrites. They apparently had plotted the whole affair beforehand in order to make capital out of these revival tendencies in the Welsh Church of Lushai. They began to "speak in tongues" according to the Bible, 'full of the Holy Ghost', and pretended to make known the Will of God through their unintelligible mutterings which they themselves later interpreted to their own advantage.

They soon secured a large following among their gullible Lushai fellow villagers. This gave them an increasing power which they intended to use for their own benefit. At last they conceived the idea of finding the Will of God through opening the Bible at random and seeking their daily guidance by reading the text on the open page. Their interpretation of the text was clearly intended to benefit themselves. If the passage found at random referred to sacrifices, the two elders would demand that the faithful surrender their livestock to them. Did the passage refer to the raining of Manna from the skies they accordingly advised the people to cease cultivation as God would soon rain down rice from heaven. They also predicted that the end of the world was near. The children were the first to take them seriously and to play truant instead of going to school since it was clearly useless to learn when the whole world was going to end soon.

Neither the local mission teacher nor the headman of the village was able to bring the community to its senses and expose the obvious fraud of the two elders. They summoned the pastor. However, this worthy man was driven from the pulpit when he started to warn the congregation against the childish and harmful teachings of the two rogues. He was even expelled from the church. He went, but did not find the matter important enough to report it to his superiors.

The madness began to spread to other villages and to assume dangerous dimensions. The village headman a sensible man

played on the fears of the main leader and told him that he would receive a long prison sentence unless he mended his ways. He was promised leniency if he admitted that he had committed a fraud and that it was not the Holy Ghost who had spoken out through the elders. The man finally confessed in public. As a result the village community slowly returned to normalcy. The Superintendent true to his given word persuaded the Governor of Assam to show great clemency and the incident was closed without any punishment of the culprits. Since no one was punished the movement subsided without leaving any scar on the mind of the villagers.

Learning a timely lesson from this incident the mission authorities took vigilant care that such movements did not arise in other places. Thus the revival movement among the Lushais died down without further unpleasant incidents.

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4. AMONG THE KACHIA NAGAS

The Kacharis — or Dimasas as they call themselves (from *Dimapur* their ancient capital) — are a section of the great Bodo tribe that immigrated into Assam from southern China in successive waves. The Kacharis at one time a numerous and vigorous tribe were however driven from their habitats in Sibsagar and Nowgong districts by the Ahoms and in the sixteenth century migrated first to Maibong and then to the Cachar Plains. During this time they were converted to Hinduism. The tribe decimated by continuous fighting and migrations sank into insignificance. Fighting off the Manipuris and Burmese with changing fortune the Kacharis finally succumbed to the British who in 1832 annexed their territory but even after annexation the Cachar country was repeatedly subjected to raids by the wild and rapacious hill tribes who surrounded it especially by the Lushais.

It is obvious that the Kacharis who had lost their former tribal strength and importance and had also been deprived of their political independence were ripe for a messianic movement. Their desire for a revival of their original greatness was expressed by their belief in the return of a king who would drive out the

foreign invaders and rule over "all who eat from the wooden platter", i.e. all Nagas. This king was believed to be sleeping in a cave in the Kacha Naga country. He may be identified with the Kachari King Bhim Raja who ruled from 1496 to 1533 and of whom such a story is told.

At any rate, in 1882 a Kachari Messiah appeared who promised to lead the Kachari Nagas to freedom and greatness. Already some years earlier a certain Sambhudan, of a village in the North Cachar Hills, had set himself up as a fee-charging worker of miraculous cures. His fame soon spread and people travelled long distances, in some cases even from remote villages in the plains, to consult him, bringing buffaloes, goats and fowls as their fee.

After some time, however, finding that he could not work the miracles he pretended to, Sambhudan's patients began to fall off. Finding that his reputation was on the wane and his income decreasing rapidly, Sambhudan now gave out that he was inspired by the gods and in the course of a short time succeeded in collecting a small band of followers — between thirty and forty — who all professed to be equally inspired. From among his disciples the new self-styled Messiah chose two as his main assistants, one of them, *Man Shinge*, he appointed as his high priest.

While at first Sambhudan's followers were scattered here and there in their own villages and only visited him occasionally, in 1881 the new Messiah decided to settle his disciples in a closed village and he selected for this purpose Maibang, the old capital of the Kachari Rajas. For the building of new houses Sambhudan needed labour and money. Consequently he began to impress labour and to levy contributions from the people of the surrounding villages. He practically lived at free quarters on the forced contributions of his neighbours. He soon became the terror of the country-side.

After some time when the depredations of the new movement assumed such an extent that they could no longer be ignored by the local authorities, the Deputy Commissioner, Major Boyd, issued summonses to Sambhudan and his closest associates to appear before his court. But the new Messiah failed to obey. A warrant for Sambhudan's arrest was then placed in the hands of some Kachari headmen. When the bearers of the warrant

appeared before Sambhudan they were not ill treated, but a letter, written by Man Shinge, Sambhudan's high priest and secretary, was handed to them, and they were ordered to leave Maibang immediately and to return to Gonjong. The letter, almost illegible, stated that even an army would not induce Sambhudan to appear at court, as this was not befitting such an exalted personage. The threat was added that any force despatched to Maibang would be annihilated.

The Deputy Commissioner waited till January 1882 for Sambhudan to appear. Then he decided to march to Maibang himself with a force of Frontier Police and arrest the new trouble-making Messiah. Sambhudan was warned of the approaching police force and advised the inhabitants of Maibang to remain inside their houses when the police party arrived, for he intended to call upon the gods to rain stones upon his adversaries and he did not want *them* to get hurt too.

On the arrival of the police party Sambhudan and his followers were found to have left Maibang. Only a few hangers on of the movement were captured. Sambhudan in fact had meanwhile proceeded by another route to Gonjong, the headquarters of the North Cachar sub-division, about six hours' journey from Maibang with about twenty of his followers. He burned the place killing a police constable and two servants.

This success gave him courage, he returned with his force to Maibang, where Major Boyd with his twenty five constables had encamped for the night. No fighting took place during the night, but early the following morning the alarm was given and the Kacharis were seen rushing on the camp in a body from the neighbouring jungles. The rebels were armed with long double-edged swords and *daos* (hatchets) and were preceded by two men beating drums. They made no attempt to take cover but rushed on in a compact body, Sambhudan having assured them that his magic spells would make them invulnerable. Major Boyd on the other hand, had issued orders not to fire on the attackers as he wanted to avoid bloodshed as long as possible.

However, after the rebels had wounded Major Boyd and a sepoy, the police, being hard pressed were forced to open fire. As soon as the Kacharis saw that Sambhudan's promise was false and that the bullets of the sepoys were not turned away harmless

from their targets by the gods, they broke and fled, leaving seven dead on the ground. Four bodies were afterwards found in the jungle, bringing the total of killed up to eleven. Many more were wounded, but they escaped and their subsequent fate is unknown.

Unfortunately Major Boyd's wound, a severe cut in the hand from a *dao*, was not speedily treated in the absence of proper medical assistance. Tetanus set in and he died a few days later.

Sambhudan himself, who had cautiously held himself in the back of his force, urging them on but not leading them, escaped capture for some time, but a year later his hiding place was discovered. A police party was despatched and surrounded the place. In attempting to cut his way through the cordon of police, Sambhudan was shot in the leg. The wound was not quickly attended to, and Sambhudan bled to death. Man Shinge, his principal adviser and high-priest, was arrested in Tipperah and sentenced to penal servitude for life.

Though the Kacharis in the hills now realized that Sambhudan was not their true redeemer, and had not been deputed by the gods to wage war against the British, they were not shaken for a moment in their conviction that a real Messiah would have all the powers that Sambhudan had claimed for himself, and that the bodies of men could be possessed by the gods. Many Kacharis had waited anxiously to see whether Sambhudan was their true Messiah. Had he been successful against Major Boyd, they would have thrown in their lot with him, for they all dreamed of regaining their freedom, and believed that they could achieve it with supernatural aid when a real Messiah made his appearance. As often in messianic movements, when a prophecy fails to come true it is the prophet, not his prophecy, that is discredited. The failure is *his* fault. Thus the way remains open for another prophet to come forward with a slightly modified version of the doctrine and claiming that he, and not his predecessor, is the true Messenger of God and Messiah.

After the defeat of Sambhudan, the Kacharis had to wait a long while till another leader arose to claim superhuman powers and to *promise to free the country of all earthly misery and of any foreign intruders*. The fact should not be overlooked that the Kacharis were always anxious to get rid not only of the British, but also of the Kukis.

It was only in 1929, that a new Messiah arose among the Kacharis. He promised to liberate the Nagas from the yoke of both Kuku and British. His name was Jadonang, and he was from the village Kambiron. From youth he had displayed visionary powers. Later he began to found a new religion which consisted basically of Naga animism, but was embellished and enriched by Hindu and Christian conceptions. At first Jadonang did not break any law apparently, and the British authorities did not find any reason for interfering with his preaching.

Early in his career Jadonang associated himself with a young girl, Gaidiu, who became his devoted disciple and priestess. A British officer before whose court she was later brought for trial described her as a rather "surly little unmarried girl of seventeen". After some time Jadonang succeeded in having himself and the girl proclaimed and worshipped as gods. Temples were erected in their honour and a sacred python was installed at their residence in the village of Kambiron.

By preaching that the Naga kingdom was soon to be established the two "deities" secured a large following. The programme outlined by Jadonang was, in short, that all Kukus (their arch enemies) would be massacred and that all their possessions would be spent in one stupendous feast of merit. Then the millennium would begin: the Nagas would henceforth live on their new gods' miraculous bounty, wanting nothing and with no further necessity for manual work.

Meanwhile the worthy pair collected a large amount of tribute from their followers, threatening all who refused to pay and to obey *their orders with exile and a worse fate in the near future*. They exacted their tribute by means of agents mostly ruffians who were known to be the most disreputable members of the three tribes affected by the new movement.

However, Jadonang did not stop at extortion. One day four Manipuri traders were kidnapped by his followers and apparently sacrificed to the new gods. Their goods were distributed among the leaders of the movement. The police, informed about the murder, soon found sufficient evidence of Jadonang's guilt. After a fair trial he was condemned to death and hanged, his accomplices in the murder received long jail sentences. The Government now made the fatal mistake of releasing Gaidiu, she appeared to be too young to have had any responsibility for the crime. As

soon as she was set free, her agents took her to the north and a few days later the whole Kacha Naga country rose in revolt. This happened in August 1931

The British Government had to send troops to all three districts in which Kacha Nagas had settled to Manipur, the Naga Hills and North Cachar. A number of outposts were established from which search parties went out to round up the rebels and to keep the districts in check. The mighty British Government was alarmed and suspected every man and woman in the Naga villages. In the many skirmishes the Naga rebels were defeated many were taken prisoner and huddled into the jails, some of them with bullet and bayonet wounds.

The country could thus be controlled but Gaidiliu could not be apprehended. Masan of Kepelo her North Cachar agent was a wily man. He had her cleverly and found ever new ways of escape when she was in a tight corner. He was utterly devoted to her and regarded her as his goddess. Once she was concealed for three months in close proximity to the military outpost at Hangrum, but no one betrayed her. She proved a very elusive prey, protected by the sympathy of the people and by the fear of retaliation if anyone should reveal her whereabouts to the British police. The pursuers were often deceived by the fact that Gaidiliu could be worshipped in spirit without her physical presence. Often the sepoy's arrived at a place of worship hoping to surprise her at last the Nagas would be still dancing round her throne — but it was empty. She had not been there at all and they had been worshipping her spirit.

When Gaidiliu left Hangrum to hide in some other refuge she left a command in the village that the outpost should be attacked. She assured the people that she had bewitched the rifles of the sepoy's that the bullets would turn into water and nobody would be killed. The people of Hangrum believed her. The Nagas are ordinarily masters of subterfuge and never make an open attack, but they trusted the assurance of their goddess that this time they could dispense with cover. One day they started the attack on the outpost in bright day light and from a side which gave them no cover whatsoever. When the sepoy's fired their first warning volley over the heads of the attackers they firmly believed that the bullets had in truth turned into water and could not hurt them.

They rushed on and were received by the second volley from a range of thirty yards. It was a miracle that all attackers were not killed outright. But even so every family of the village mourned a dead. In addition to this the Government inflicted heavy punishment on the surviving villagers and burned their village to the ground.

Gaidiliu still remained at large. The rebellion went on. Her agents were busy collecting funds for the goddess. They sold "Gaidiliu water" at ten rupees a bottle, a sure preventive against any ailment, though the water had only been drawn out of the village pond. They performed magic ceremonies in the name of Gaidiliu for those who were ill and took large fees in payment. They collected tribute from every single Naga putting a large portion aside as their own commission, but they protected Gaidiliu so well that she was never apprehended. She was obviously too valuable as source of income for them, they could not afford to lose her.

However in the end the people got tired of the never ending demands for contributions to the movement. The harassment by government and police officers also increased beyond endurance. The number of dissenters grew as the prospects for an independent Naga kingdom dwindled. Though a few informants to the police were severely punished by the rebels and some even murdered, it was only a question of time when Gaidiliu would finally be betrayed.

It happened at Pulomi in the Naga Hills. The caretaker of the rest house at Lakema heard about her hiding place and informed the police. With the intention of deceiving the spies whom Gaidiliu's lieutenants kept in every settlement a decoy raiding party was openly despatched in the wrong direction, the real search party meanwhile proceeded in the night towards Gaidiliu's shelter at Pulomi. Her guardians had been celebrating the stupidity of the police and were lying about the house in a drunken stupor. The house was protected by an amazingly strong palisade but when the police arrived they were able to climb unopposed over the palisade and break into the house. Her bodyguard was too drunk to protect her but Gaidiliu fought like a wild cat and resisted fiercely. She bit one of her captors deeply in the thumb but was finally overpowered and brought before the British officer in charge of the party.

After she had calmed down she complained to the officer that she had found little pleasure in being treated like a goddess. She had never had any privacy she said, and had not even had time to take a bath, the people wanting all the time to worship her and asking her for favours. So she was allowed to have a bath at last — in the privacy of her prison! Later she was convicted of complicity in murder and sentenced to fourteen years' jail.

At the time of Gaidiliu's capture her agents were absent and so escaped. It proved a hard task to track them down for arrest. One of them collected a band and took cruel revenge on the caretaker of the resthouse at Lakema who had betrayed Gaidiliu to the police. The caretaker himself was absent — he had gone to draw his pay — but his wife and children were taken by the rebels and strangled, and the house burned. The leader of this same band was himself shot a few years later when he was resisting arrest.

Gaidiliu was not confined to any one jail, but was moved from one jail to another in Assam, Shillong, Aijal, Tura and many other places so as to make it impossible for anyone to plan her liberation. For some time she was in Manipur jail and during that period Kacha Nagas of the neighbouring villages were allowed to visit her. Gaidiliu used the opportunity to incite them to rebellion and she did succeed in reviving the movement again for a short time. But without any able leaders it could not be sustained and soon broke down.

The hope of deliverance from foreign rule did not, however, die among the Kacha Nagas. They still believed that one day Gaidiliu would return and lead them to freedom. Before she had been arrested she had told her followers that even if she were caught by the police her real and divine self could not be imprisoned, but would escape from the jail and leave only a dead log of wood in the cell. Her spirit would return to her people in such a disguise that her enemies would not recognize her. Only her true followers would know her and she would lead them to victory.

This belief revived shortly before the Second World War when the Kacha Nagas found her spirit incarnated in a young British girl doing anthropological research in the Naga country. Later on, during the war, this British girl was able to organize a strong

guerilla defence party against the threatening invasion of the Japanese. She succeeded in her task largely owing to this curious belief.

Gaidiliu's revolutionary movement was but vaguely known to the national leaders of India who were themselves engaged in a struggle for freedom. The Kachin Nagas wanted freedom only for their own tribal community and were not in the least concerned with the Indian freedom movement. But on an election tour in 1938 Pandit Nehru heard about Rani Gaidiliu from Nagas who met him at Haslong. He made her case a plank in his campaign of agitation. At the Haripura Session of the Indian National Congress in 1938 he demanded her release. The British authorities of course refused his request.

Gaidiliu was released from jail only after Independence had been achieved. From the new Indian Government she received a monthly pension of two hundred rupees as a political sufferer.

In February 1954 when the President of India Dr Rajendra Prasad paid a visit to Imphal a Naga woman in a black turban like hood and a striped and embroidered wrap walked in and stood with many others at the fringe of the tarmac on the Koirangel airfield of Imphal to welcome him. A legendary figure in the thirties she had left her secluded life in a remote village to greet the President of a free India. The Chief Commissioner of Manipur introduced Gaidiliu to the President and she brought out from under her wrap a token present of a flower made of Naga textile. The President thanked her kindly. It is doubtful whether he knew her history but there was no time to explain Gaidiliu's role to him. She returned sadly to her seclusion.

More recent events proved that Gaidiliu or Guldallo as she was also called had not abandoned her ambition. In the present troubled times when the Nagas are fighting for their complete or at least a limited independence Gaidiliu revived her dream of a kingdom of her own. In 1961 she renewed her agitation and started a movement with one hundred and fifty to two hundred followers half of whom were armed. Soon the activities of the movement were extended to the North Cachar Hills and circulars were issued to all Nagas calling on them to join her army. The Rani (queen) as she liked to be called committed several serious depredations and was even accused of offering human sacrifices.

in the tribal villages of Tamenglong. Her arsenal also had been increased by fire arms looted from villages in the North Cachar Hills and in Manipur. When the Indian Police wanted to arrest her she went underground and could not be found any more. To make her hiding place more secure the rumour was spread that Gaidiliu had suddenly died at the age of sixty in January 1965. But it was found later that this information was incorrect. Rani Gaidiliu is still alive and obviously waiting for an opportunity to renew her agitation.

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MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS IN NORTH INDIA

THE earliest traceable messianic movements in North India owe their origin to Muslim missionaries who were men of outstanding character and great religious zeal. To the down-trodden masses of India who could not find consolation in Hindu religion for their degradation and distress they carried the new and consoling message of Islam that all men are equal and brothers and that no one has a brief for the exploitation and oppression of his fellow man. On the other hand, the Hindu scriptures (which they were forbidden to read) clearly stated that the only hope for the low castes and untouchables lay in a passive and patient acceptance of their hard lot, revolt and rebellion against which would only lead to a worse fate in the subsequent rebirth.

This type of 'Saviour' of whom Muinud Din Chishti is perhaps the greatest representative was later replaced by self-appointed Messiahs carried away by their belief in Mahdis restorers of the faith. They incited a number of movements with the avowed aims of reforming certain abuses that had crept into Islam in the course of time probably by the overpowering influence of Hinduism and of fighting all enemies of the faith. They usually found ready followers, often over-zealous and fanatical who were not satisfied with the conversion of infidels by mere persuasion but placed their confidence in force and the power of the sword. In their zeal they often severely criticized their more moderate fellow Muslims and thus got into trouble with the established authority who found ample cause for persecuting and condemning them for heresy and other crimes. Thus many such movements came to grief not so much in the struggle with their opponents but through the guardians of the prevailing political and religious authorities. The following pages will provide ample proof of this general statement.

A third type of messianic movements arose in the decades before and after the turn of the eighteenth century. At that time the religious and political situation in northern India was very troubled. Muslims and Sikhs fought for supremacy and the

numerous petty kings and princes were constantly on the warpath against each other. Their rule was a source of anxiety, confusion and anarchy, from which the poor subjects were the main sufferers. They found no security of property and life. brigands abounded and the regular soldiers were scarcely any better than robbers. Armies swept constantly over the devastated countryside.

Not even in their religious convictions were the peoples of northern India allowed any peace. In the struggle for power between Hindus and Muslims and between Muslims and Sikhs the poor inhabitants were constantly forced to change their religion, always in favour of that of the victorious party.

No wonder that these endless political and spiritual troubles made the population despair of human help and expect a saviour and deliverer only from above. People eagerly expecting such heavenly deliverers are easily convinced by the claims of pretenders and obey with alacrity the commands of self-styled Messiahs to follow and be saved. Some messianic movements of this type lasted only a short time and collapsed when the leaders could not sustain their claims but other movements spread widely and rapidly and later consolidated into regular sects and religions which survive to the present day. Most of the Saviours of northern India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were Muslims by religion a few are known to have been Sikhs and Hindus.

The Muslim Messiahs usually claimed to be closely connected with Mohammed the Prophet and to carry out his personally revealed orders. They insisted first on a spiritual conversion. The precepts of Islam would have to be observed to the letter, abuses abolished and religious discipline restored before deliverance from all earthly evils could be achieved. Religion was thus closely coupled with politics and religious reformation made a necessary condition for economic improvement, social deliverance and political independence. On the other hand no claimant to the title of Messiah or saviour could maintain his leadership if these material and temporal benefits were not actually obtained. If the Messiah failed to deliver the goods the movement collapsed. Many such saviours lost both life and freedom in their campaigns.

I AN EARLY MOHAMMEDAN 'MESSIAH

The life of Muminud Din Chishti proves that Saviours were not lacking in the Middle Ages in India when Islam was still young in the country and struggling for survival and expansion. Hindu society in those days was very much in the feudal stage, that is to say, it consisted of a small number of persons of privileged status enjoying the fruits of the labour of large numbers of underprivileged classes. The Islamic doctrines of the equality of man and the brotherhood of all the faithful followers of the Prophet must have come as a revolutionary but very consoling message to the low castes and untouchables of Hindu India. No wonder they joined the Muslim Faith in large numbers. Muslim conversion work was the more effective when it was carried out by great personalities like Muminud Din Chishti, a mystic and miracle worker.

He was thus a worthy inaugurator of messianic movements which had always abounded in North India and have survived into very recent times.

Not only was Muminud Din considered a great Muslim saint by contemporary and later generations, he himself cherished the conviction that he was one with God. He is reported to have said: "When we transcended the externals and looked around we found the lover, the beloved and the love (itself) to be one, i.e. in the sphere of Oneness all is one!" This monistic approach not only brought him close to Hindu Upanishadic thought and to Bhakti movements, but could easily prompt him to feel divinely inspired to assume a messianic role in Ajmer. It is almost certain that he felt himself ordained by God to bring the people of Ajmer into the Islamic fold.

Another significant axiom of his was that the highest form of devotion to God was to redress the misery of those in distress, to fulfil the needs of the helpless and to feed the hungry. According to him, the qualities which endear a man to God are these: first, a river-like generosity; secondly, sun-like affection; and thirdly, earth-like hospitality. Such religious axioms form the foundation of his messianic role in Ajmer.

It is unfortunate that we have so few authentic records of historical value about Muminud Din. Much that is related about

his life must be relegated to the realm of legend and fiction. Though his life story, as composed by later hagiologists regales us with many legendary stories it proves clearly that Munnud Din Chishti was regarded as a prophet and a revolutionary, a prophet because he was preaching a new and saving faith for the underprivileged Hindu classes and was a rebel against the prevailing Hindu order and against Hindu rule in Ajmer. He not only created a strong conversion movement towards Islam but was in some way also responsible for the downfall of Hindu power as represented by the Chauhan Rajput rulers in North India and the political victory of Islam. His life at Ajmer was therefore of great religious and political significance for the history of North India.

Khwaja Munnud Din Ajmeri is said to have been born in Sanjar in Sistan (South Afghanistan) in 1142 or according to other authorities A.D. 1136. He traced his descent in his father's as well as his mother's line from the grandsons of Mohammed. His ancestors for several generations were reputed to be mystics thus his own inclination to mysticism might appear hereditary. At the death of his father whom he lost at the age of fourteen he received as his portion of the inheritance a garden and a millstone. These were his only means of subsistence.

When he was still young his native place Sanjar was sacked by Tatars and the sight of the massacre and the awful atrocities committed by the invaders probably intensified his feeling that the world was a place of vanity. Munnud Din came under the influence of Shaykh Ibrahim Quandozi a Muslim saint and mystic who often fell into ecstasy.

Shaykh Ibrahim is said to have transmitted his own deep spiritual vitality to the young Munnud Din by giving him a piece of bread that he had first chewed. This bread having been in intimate contact with the holy man was believed to possess supernatural power and acted like magic imparting to him in an instant all the spiritual knowledge that Ibrahim possessed. The result was that the boy renounced the world, sold all his worldly possessions and distributed them among the poor.

It is not known how long Munnud Din remained a disciple of Shaykh Ibrahim. It cannot have been long for soon we find him as a wandering hermit in search of a spiritual guide. First he spent a couple of years in Samarkand to complete his religious

education, and from there he went to Bukhara and Harun where he entered the Chishti Order. After he had served Khwaja Uthman Haruni for perhaps twenty years, he was appointed his vice regent and sent to India to gain disciples for the order. During his twenty years as a disciple he made a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina.

Some biographers mention that it was the Prophet Mohammed himself who, in a vision, asked him to go to India as his representative and convert the idolaters to the faith of Islam. In any case Khwaja Munnud Din taking leave of his spiritual master started out on his long journey which was to end finally at Ajmer in North India.

According to Sufi doctrines, mysticism does not merely consist of knowledge to be acquired but includes power and illumination that may be gained through personal contact with living saints. Consequently, Khwaja Munnud Din tried hard to meet all the famous saints of his time and visited all the shrines of the departed saints in the course of his long journey from Harun, in the province of Nishapur, to Ajmer, via Iraq and Persia.

First he came to Baghdad, where he met the founder of the Qadiri Order. There he also met the most renowned saints of the Suhrawardi Order. Thus Munnud Din, though belonging to the Chishti Order, acquired also the spiritual gifts of these other two famous Sufi Orders. Then passing through Hamadan and Tabriz, Isfahan, Mehna and Kharquan, he visited a number of saints living in these places. In Herat he stopped for some time at the tomb of a saint who had been a companion of the Prophet. Leaving Herat he came to a place known as Sabzwar, where the first demonstration of his spiritual power took place.

It was the miraculous conversion of Muhammad Yadgar, the governor of that place. Munnud Din by merely glancing at this man, notorious for his evil conduct and grown very wealthy through extortion, made him conscious of his sins and full of repentance. Then Munnud Din shared with him a cup of water, *drinking half himself and giving the rest to him*. Through this rite he transmitted some of his own spiritual power to the new disciple whose heart was instantaneously illuminated and completely changed. The former notorious sinner became suddenly a saint, sold all he had, compensated those he had wronged, and

distributed what was left to the poor. Finally, he set at liberty all his slaves. The proud governor, now a humble disciple divested of all his worldly splendour, accompanied his new master as far as Husar Shadman where, after receiving final instructions he remained as Muinud Din's vice-regent, seeking to lead others into the mystic path. Muinud Din proceeded to Balkh.

Leaving Balkh, Muinud-Din passed on his way through numerous towns and cities, visiting shrines, meeting the leading saints and scholars of his time, working miracles, turning sinners into saints, and converting innumerable persons to Islam. Advancing thus like a victor who subdues his opponents and receives homage from his adherents, Muinud Din entered India and, marching over the frontier, came to the Punjab, which had already received the light of Islam through earlier invaders from the North. In Lahore he spent some time, and in 1162 went with the army of Shihab-Din Ghuri to Delhi where through his miracles and eloquent preaching he is said to have converted many Hindus to the faith of Islam. Eventually in A.D. 1165 or 1166, at the age of fifty two, he reached Ajmer which was destined to be his last resting place, and through him became the Mecca of the members of the Chishti Order throughout the world.

The narrative of his early residence in Ajmer is embellished with stories of supernatural events and miracles he performed, but these have no historical value. Nevertheless a brief description of some of these shall be given here to acquaint the reader with Muslim ideas about this renowned saint.

In Ajmer, Muinud Din came in conflict with the ruling prince, Raja Prithviraj. It must have been Prithviraj II. It is obvious that the Raja resented his entrance into his dominion for he must have assumed that the famous Muslim saint, though he came as a peaceful missionary, was at the same time the forerunner of an invading Muslim army. Prithviraj must have remembered how his father had to fight off Muslim armies.

The story of Muinud Din relates the struggle which followed between the saint and the court magicians in which the Muslim invariably remained victorious. The discomfiture of the Raja's magicians before the miraculous power of Muinud Din is described in terms no less striking and impressive than those used of the magicians who opposed Moses in the court of the Pharaoh. The

same story also reveals clearly that the saint came with the definite intention of converting all the inhabitants of Ajmer to the Muslim faith. He was of course utterly convinced of the truth of Islam and of the necessity for all men to embrace this religion as the only way to salvation.

On first entering the city, it is related, the spot selected by Munnud Din as his resting place happened to be the place reserved for the Raja's camels, and he was not allowed to stay there. Munnud Din deprived the camels of the power of standing up by a curse which was only lifted after urgent prayers of the drivers.

News of this miracle spread throughout the city, so that everybody was talking about it. The Raja, hearing of the intrusion of a Muslim mendicant into his territory, became exceedingly angry and ordered his immediate expulsion. When a body of soldiers approached the saint with the intention of carrying out their master's orders, he took up a handful of dust and threw it over them, blinding some of them and paralyzing others. Only the prayer of the saint restored the lost powers of sight and movement.

Physical force having failed to expel Munnud Din, the Raja strove to overcome this champion of Islam in intellectual combat, hoping that in such a contest the Muslim intruder would be defeated and out of shame leave the country crest-fallen. Consequently on the following morning Ram Dev, the royal priest (*mahant*) together with hundreds of leading Brahmins (*pandits*) was ordered to meet Munnud Din in religious debate. The Muslim hagiographers record that one glance from the saint was sufficient to disclose to the *mahant* the falsehood of his polytheistic beliefs and to reveal to him the truth and beauty of Islam. Thus confounded and subdued he embraced Islam and became a Muslim.

The Raja's discomfiture was now complete. Alarmed at Munnud Din's supernatural powers, the Raja next sought the assistance of Jaipal Jogi, the chief magician of the court. Muslim narrators at this point give the most fantastic account of the conflict which is supposed to have taken place between Munnud-Din and this magician. In fact, the story of the display of supernatural powers on both sides surpasses by far the wonders of Egypt during the time of Moses. Jaipal was conquered — it is

needless to mention it — and humiliated, accepted Islam and was renamed Abdullah

However fantastic these stories may be, at least it is certain that the saint was allowed by the Raja to reside at Ajmer peacefully and even to have disciples. After a while, however, so the hagiographers relate, the Raja objected strongly to the conversion work of Muinud-Din and began to persecute his disciples. At this point the biographers of the saint omit to mention that Prithviraj II had died and had been followed, after some struggle of succession, by his step-brother and then by his uncle Someshwara. The Prithviraj who plays such an important part in the subsequent history of the saint is Prithviraj III, the son of Someshwara, who came to power in 1177.

Thus a number of years must have passed while Khwaja Muinud-Din served his God faithfully and ecstatically and made many converts in Ajmer. For most of the Sufi Orders as well as individual Sufis, at one time or other, regarded the conversion of non-Muslims as one of their primary spiritual objectives in India. In fact, Muinud-Din had been sent to India expressly for this purpose, and he had now selected Ajmer as the centre of his religious and missionary activity. Ajmer was at this time the very heartland of Hindu military aristocracy. The choice of this town by the Muslim saint was significant.

As his biographers report, Muinud Din supported his preaching by a life of prayer and meditation, and unmitigated austerities. His diet was of the barest and coarsest variety, his dress, a simple tunic, when it wore out in any place, he would patch it up himself.

People came from far and near to hear his preaching, to make their offerings and to seek his blessings. Many miracles began to be attributed to him.

His evening prayer meetings became famous. Crowds of his followers used to frequent them to sing devotional songs (*qawwalis*). He even employed a band of musicians to accompany the songs. Islam has a strong iconoclastic element in its system, but it positively and freely invites the arts of poetry and music into its religious services. The Sufis — Muinud Din was one of their most prominent members — had always emphasized the emotional side of religion. Thus the evening prayer meetings of Muinud Din appear much like revival meetings in which sentiment and feeling

played an important part. Muinud-Din's converts must have found the change of religion easier for them by these prayer meetings, for they had had something similar in the Hindu *bhakti* cults.

No wonder that ultimately the Hindus became jealous of Muinud-Din's success and asked the Raja to put a stop to his unrestricted religious activities. Prithviraj did so and forbade the conversion work of Muinud-Din and began to persecute his disciples.

Muinud Din, exasperated at the intolerant attitude of the Raja towards his missionary activities, decided on his deposition. In words that indicated Muinud Din's conviction that God had granted him the supreme authority over Ajmer and the kingdom of Prithviraj he disposed of the king with the following solemn sentence: 'I herewith hand over Prithviraj alive into the hands of King Shihabud Din.'

This was practically the death sentence for Prithviraj's precarious independence. For it was clear that the Sultan of Ghur was just waiting for this chance — an invitation by such a highly reputed religious leader — to invade Ajmer territory and to annex it. However, fate decided to grant the Raja a short breathing space. In the battle of Tarain Prithviraj was able to defeat the Sultan and to keep his army out of his territory. If Prithviraj had then united with another Hindu ruler and pursued his success, he might have averted the worst, but this chance was lost. Prithviraj did not follow up his victory, but was satisfied with the expulsion of the invader.

The Sultan meanwhile collected another Muslim army and marched at the head of it towards Ajmer. He sent an emissary to Prithviraj inviting him to embrace Islam and to acknowledge his supremacy. The Raja indignantly refused to submit. Some time later, in 1192, Sultan Shihabud Din Muhammad Ghori declared war on Prithviraj and defeated him at Sirhind in a decisive battle. Prithviraj was taken prisoner. Thus the prophecy of Muinud Din was fulfilled. The battle of Sirhind was a turning point in the history of Hindu India. It marked the end of an undisturbed Hindu era in India. From now onward Islam and Muslim culture had come to stay. The uniformity of 'Aryavarta' was forever lost.

Shihabud Din attributed his victory to the prayers of Muinud-Din. At least this was the claim of the saint's later biographers.

The Sultan came to Ajmer to pay him his respects and while there he transformed the great temple of Prithviraj into a mosque in the record time of two and a half days. It is for this reason that the building, as it stands today, is called *Dhai Din ka Jhonpra*, the 'Two-and-a-half Day Structure.'

Shortly afterwards Prithviraj was executed by the Sultan. His brother and successor rebelled against the Muslims and, when he faced defeat, committed suicide. The victor appointed a governor for Ajmer and departed.

Thus Muinud-Din remained the undisputed spiritual master of Ajmer, richly endowed, entitled to collect state revenues, and protected by the political Muslim power. By force and the might of the sword Muinud-Din had ensured the survival of his religious work in Ajmer. By calling on the mighty power of the nearest Muslim ruler, already waiting on the border for a chance to invade the kingdom of Prithviraj, he was responsible for the political and spiritual breakdown of Hindu resistance. Thus his prophecy was fulfilled.

It appears that Muinud-Din remained a celibate even to old age, but eventually he married. His wedded life began only after the conquest of Ajmer by the Muslims. He married two wives who bore him four children.

Khwaja Muinud-Din died in 1236, full of honours and with the reputation of being a saint. Even Hindus venerated him. The Husaini Brahmins acknowledged Muinud-Din as a divinity. His tomb at Ajmer is the most celebrated of all Muslim shrines in India. On the occasion of the anniversary of his death (*urs*) Muslims from every part of India make pilgrimage to it.

It is reported that his tomb was a favourite pilgrimage place for Akbar who came every year between 1570 and 1582 to Ajmer to honour the saint and to distribute gifts to the poor. He built himself a palace at Ajmer for this purpose. Akbar had a great devotion to this saint and attributed his victory over Chitor and the birth of his son Jehangir to his intercession. In 1567 he travelled the whole distance from Delhi to Ajmer (280 miles) on foot in thanksgiving for his conquest of Chitor, and repeated the feat after the birth of his son Jehangir. Two of his eldest sons were born at Ajmer so as to be under the influence of the saint's blessing.

Even at the present day Muinud-Din's memory is alive. Time

has not dimmed his memory or the reverence in which he has always been held. Year after year people keep coming, many with a long-cherished wish to be fulfilled by the saint, or simply to honour him and through him, God.

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2 THE MAHDAVI MOVEMENTS

The Mahdavi movements — regarded as heretical by Muslim orthodoxy — have deeply affected Islamic countries during the past centuries. In India they have been productive of a number of messianic movements.

The doctrine of the advent of a *mujaddid* or 'Restorer of the Faith', a Mahdi, after a decline of Islam is based on certain alleged prophecies of Mohammed himself. The movement seems to have had its origin in Badakhshan, beyond Afghanistan, from where it spread to Persia as well as to India. The doctrine was obviously connected with ideas of a Millenarianism, for it was especially in the century of the completion of the first millennium of the Muslim era that the Mahdi was expected. In fact, during this century the advent of the Mahdi was everywhere in India discussed by Muslim divines.

The Mahdavi movements were generally headed by men of good character and of some education, who possessed eloquence as preachers and could move the masses. They were, moreover, ardent defenders and reformers of Islam and zealous propagators of Muslim rule over the whole world. They assumed a definitely hostile attitude towards the men who held office at the Mughal court because of their compromises, which are inevitable for politicians, but naturally invite the criticism of men zealous for the purity of the faith. Not only their reforming activities but their frequent indiscreet interference in politics brought the Mahdis frequently into conflict with the established authority and caused their final downfall.

realize God. He preached that the ultimate aim of man is to see God in this world even to become one with the Universal Being. He encouraged his followers to meditate constantly on God, to renounce the transitory world, to have complete trust in Him, and to wander in the company of the great souls.

At the age of forty, Sayyid Muhammad declared himself to be the predicted Mahdi. He possessed many endowments which apparently qualified him for the role of a Mahdi. He was a lineal descendant of the Prophet and bore his name by which conditions the prophecy was fulfilled that 'Muhammad Mahdi shall be of my family'. He next saw in the fall of Jaunpur (in 1479) a sign that the latter days had arrived, he claimed to work miracles, and announced that a voice from heaven had whispered to him, assuring him that he was the Mahdi the twelfth Imam of Islam.

The number of his followers increased steadily. The Mughals watched his rising influence with disfavour and expelled him from his home town. Sayyid Muhammad left Jaunpur with his household and a few disciples. He travelled through the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Central Provinces, Deccan and Gujarat. Here he found a rather half-hearted protector and adherent in Sultan Mahmood Begra. To the great relief of Mahmood Sayyid Muhammad went with some of his followers on a pilgrimage to Mecca but he was expelled from Mecca too because of his claims to be the Mahdi and returned to India.

Finally he got tired of his exalted position and announced to his followers that he had received a revelation which allowed him to renounce his Mahdi title. After some years he proceeded towards Persia via Chaman and Kandahar. He travelled restlessly through Khurasan and reached Ferrah in the province of Herat (Afghanistan) where he died in 1505 or 1506. He won thousands of followers wherever he went.

In Sind, Gujarat and Deccan hundreds of thousands of people embraced this new religion. Even Burhan Nizam Shah (1508-53) the third king of the Nizam Shahi dynasty of Ahmednagar became an adherent and even gave his daughter to one of the grandsons of Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri. Almost all the courts of the Deccan Muslim kings were crowded with Mahdavis and many of them found employment in the armies. They also

advanced towards South India where they undertook military service under the various petty Rajas and Nawabs.

But the whole movement fizzled out because its inaugurator was unable to lead his followers towards a definite goal and lost heart when opposition arose. He then renounced his leadership and abandoned his disciples.

Though this sect as a whole disappeared, pockets of it survived in isolated centres. The memory of this Mahdi is still revered, for instance, in the district of Kirman in Baluchistan, where a sect has survived that calls itself *Zikri*. The members of the sect are mostly nomads. They call themselves also *Da'irwale* (People of the Circle), because they erect stone circles (*da'irah*) on the night of *Layal-ul-Qadr* (feast of the 'Night of Power, or Decree'); within the circles they perform their heretical ritual.

Other centres of the *Da'irwale* sect are at Channapatna, Bannur, and Kirigaval in Mysore State. The members of the sect appear to be spiritual descendants of the Mahdi of Jaunpur. This particular group owes its origin to the preaching of one Sayyid Ahmad, who was born in 1444 in Gujarat, and who evidently had come in contact with Muhammad Jaunpuri. He settled at Jivanpur in the Nizam's Dominions preaching the Mahdavi doctrines and posing as the Mahdi. In a religious controversy with orthodox Muslim divines, however, he was worsted and sought asylum further south in Channapatna in Mysore State. There he founded a community of the faithful. *He is said to have died in 1505.*

His followers boast of a separate mosque, or rather assembly hall, where they say their prayers. Their priest concludes every prayer meeting with the words: 'Imam Mahdi came and went away; he who does not believe in this is an infidel'.

The members of the sect are very exclusive and marry only among themselves. In the past they have had many conflicts with the orthodox Sunnis. Tippu Sultan persecuted them. They are locally known as *Dairh* (circle), because they live in closed social units. They are now a peaceful and prosperous community. Many of them carry on a brisk trade in silk with the west coast, others specialize in the manufacture of wooden toys which they paint in beautiful and gorgeous colours. This has become the chief industry of the place.

(c) *Mahdi Shaykh Alai of Bayana*

Another Mahdi appeared in North India during the reign of Islam Shah (1545-52). He was a Dervish named Shaykh Alai a resident of Bayana near Agra. He lived for some time with another like minded Muslim, Miyan Abd Allah who had himself been a follower of the Mahdi of Jaunpur.

Shaykh Alai openly declared himself to be the Mahdi and collected six or seven hundred heads of families as adherents. With his converts he migrated to Khawashpur near Jodhpur. When his activities came to the knowledge of the Sultan, Islam Shah, he summoned Shaykh Alai to his court at Agra. The Mahdi was found guilty and exiled to the Deccan.

As he did not cease proclaiming his Mahdavi doctrines even there, he was again summoned to Agra and ordered to renounce his heretical views and to admit that he was not the Mahdi but Shaykh Alai steadfastly refused to recant. Finally the Ulama condemned him as a heretic and ordered him to be scourged. Shaykh Alai expired after the third blow. His community of followers has disappeared.

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(d) *A Mahdi among the Kuki Nagas*

Stray Mahdavi movements can be reported from other parts of India. Sometimes the title of Mahdi was assumed to give religious support to the personal ambition of an adventurer. One such instance is reported from Assam. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Assam belonged to the Burmese kingdom though the turbulent Naga tribes were left very much to themselves and were busy fighting each other. This was a good opportunity for a gamble for big gains by daring adventurers.

In 1799, Aga Muhammad Reza an Iranian Muslim adventurer entered Cachar from Sylhet and by his machinations made himself master of that country. He overpowered the local Raja Krishna Chandra (1773-1813) with the help of the Kuki Nagas whom he had won over. The Raja was driven to the hills and lost his realm.

3. THE ROSHANIYAH MOVEMENT

From the earliest Islamic times there have existed sects professing doctrines not inculcated by the Koran, or even condemned by it. These doctrines appear to have been from time to time revived in Persia and in Khorassan, which from the earliest days of Islam had been fruitful soil for heresies. A sect rose up, for instance, called the Ravendis, who taught the doctrines of transmigration of souls and the successive incarnations of the Deity. With these were associated social doctrines advocating community of women and the equal distribution of property. In the middle of the sixteenth century there was in the Punjab a revival of these doctrines, headed by Bayazid, an Ansari Shaikh. The sect founded by Bayazid flourished during the reigns of Akbar, Jehangir and Shah Jahan. The Afghans and the Pathans living in the regions between Kabul and the Indus, especially around the Khyber Pass, showed at that time considerable restlessness which affected their religion as well as their social and political life. The sect became known as the Roshaniyah, because of the title *Pir Roshan* which its founder, Miyan Bayazid Ansari, adopted for himself. This title means 'Guide of Light'. But Bayazid had a rival in the person of Akhand Darwaza, who dubbed him *Pir-i-Tarik*, which means 'Guide of Darkness'. The Mughals, enemies of Bayazid, derisively referred to him by that title and called his followers *Tarikis*.

Bayazid Ansari was born about the year 1525 or 1526 at Jullundur in the Punjab. But his father Abdulla was compelled for some reason to flee with his family to his ancestral home at Kaniguram in Waziristan, where Bayazid grew up. His childhood was a very hard one. His father divorced the mother of Bayazid and the boy was neglected by his father and ill-treated by his step-mother, so he was driven to seek the protection of an obscure kinsman, Sheikh Ismail, much to the dismay and anger of his father.

When still in his teens, Bayazid became an itinerant horse-dealer. On his journeys he met an Ismaili heretic, Mulla Sulayman, and became his disciple. Bayazid also had dealings with Hindu Jogis who initiated him into the doctrine of metempsychosis or transmigration of souls. He also adopted other tenets of the Hindus, their pantheism, for instance.

In common with all Muslim founders of new sects, Bayazid claimed to be the messenger of God. He retired to a cave near Kaniguram, devoted himself to religious exercises and passed through several stages of austerities which he imposed upon himself. He assumed the title *Pir Roshan* or *Mizan Roshan* and issued a call to the people to join his way of life. He claimed to have received direct revelations from God and that the archangel Gabriel had descended to him. He therefore assumed the role of prophet, and in this capacity ordered his adherents to practise religious austerities.

At first his teaching found no favour among the Wazirs. Bayazid was attacked and wounded by his own father. Hardly had his wound healed when he fled to Nangrahar where he found a welcome with Sultan Ahmad the Mohmand chief. Backed by the Sultan his following grew rapidly in numbers and he established his authority in the regions of the Sulayman Hills and the Khyber. Later he found ardent supporters among the Ghoria, Khel, the Khatis and Muhammadzais who had recently overrun the Peshwar plain of Hashtnagar.

Bayazid took up residence at Kalidhar from where he sent out his followers on marauding expeditions, much money was required for the support of his followers. These robberies roused Muhammad Hakim's government to action and Bayazid was arrested, taken to Kabul and confronted with the Ulemas of the court. Bayazid seems to have offered a large sum by way of ransom whereby the Ulemas were moved to intercede for him. Bayazid was released and went to Tirah where he was well received and found a home.

The doctrines of Pir Roshan show an intimate relationship with Sufi and Ismailian as well as Hindu doctrines. His teachings can be traced back to the Ravendis and similar sects. Pir Roshan taught that nothing exists but God, that he fills all space and is the substratum of all beings. 'God said he, remains concealed in the human nature like salt in water, or grain in the plant, he is the same in all his creatures and the Lord of all since nothing exists but God, what meaning is to be assigned to such terms as right and wrong, good and bad, excepting that every man should implicitly obey his religious instructor?'

'Behold now,' he added, 'I am both your god and your prophet.'

At that time the British East India Company had not yet annexed Assam, but its agents were already busy in the country and had gained a strong foothold. Aga Muhammad Reza resented this and gave out that he was the twelfth Imam and, as such, a prophet. He claimed that he was destined to deliver the country from the hated British merchants. The Kuki Nagas who equally detested the presence of the foreigners joined him with alacrity.

Reza started his liberation movement by attacking the Company's station at Bonasye with twelve hundred of his followers, but he was repulsed, and this was the end of his movement. Reza was captured by sepoys sent by the British authorities of Bengal in response to an appeal of the ousted Raja and sent to Calcutta.

The affair had a postlude, probably influenced by the Reza, the sepoys, after they had been discharged from the service of the East India Company, returned to Cachar and themselves occupied a part of the country. The Raja again appealed to the Magistrate of Sylhet who sent other sepoys who succeeded in expelling the adventurers.

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(e) *A Late Claimant for the Mahdi Role*

In past centuries Mahdism has not completely by passed Muslim Gujarat, several Mahdi pretenders, like Sayyid Muhammad of Jaunpur, Sayyid Ahmad, the founder of the *Da'irwah* sect and others, stayed for a time in Gujarat, but Mahdism had never gained a strong foothold there.

A new pretender for the role of a Mahdi arose in Gujarat in 1810. He was a Muslim named Abdul Rahaman. In early January, 1810, he proclaimed himself the Imam Mahdi and collected a band of followers mostly from the cultivating section of the Bohras, an Ismaili sect, in the east of Surat District. He marched with them against Mandvi, the seat of a Hindu chieftain. By a surprise raid he captured the fort of Mandvi and made prisoners of the chief and his minister. The ruler later made good his escape, but the minister was not so lucky and was killed.

The insurgents then captured the town of Bodhan, about fifteen miles to the east of Surat where they made their headquarters.

in a mosque. From this place the new Mahdi sent two letters to Mr Crowe, the British agent at Surat, in the first he demanded the sum of thirty pounds or three hundred rupees, and in the second he advised him to embrace the Mohammedan faith.

Meanwhile the news of the new Mahdi spread widely. A number of Muslims from Surat left the city to join the forces of Abdul Rahaman at Bodhan, while others who remained behind at Surat now began to assail the Hindus with cries of *din* (the war cry of the Muslims in battle against the 'infidels'), and there was imminent danger of a Muslim revolt in the city itself.

Under these circumstances Mr Crowe decided to march against Abdul Rahaman and arrest him, if possible. This he deemed to be the best way of crushing the revolt quickly. He arranged for four companies of infantry and two troops of cavalry to be sent to Bodhan to invest the town. The dragoons reached Bodhan at dawn, but before the infantry could reach the town, a furious engagement took place between the cavalry and the Mahdi's followers. This first battle remained indecisive, though the insurgents lost nearly two hundred men, while the cavalry lost only three and a few horses. On the arrival of the infantry the attack was renewed, and Abdul Rahaman and many of his followers were killed in the action.

With the death of the leader the religious disturbance died down. At Surat too peace was quickly restored. At the request of the Mandvi chief, who had meanwhile escaped from confinement, English troops were despatched to Mandvi to recover the fort and to re-establish the ruler in his capital. This was accomplished on January 22.

The Bohras buried their hope for political supremacy in Gujarat and in future concentrated on the acquisition of wealth by trade and other peaceful means. In this they were quite successful. Though originally a predominantly agrarian community, they have risen in status in recent years, and today they are among the most prosperous and numerous trading communities of Gujarat.

3 THE ROSHANIYAH MOVEMENT

From the earliest Islamic times there have existed sects professing doctrines not inculcated by the Koran, or even condemned by it. These doctrines appear to have been from time to time revived in Persia and in Khorassan, which from the earliest days of Islam had been fruitful soil for heresies. A sect rose up, for instance, called the Ravendis, who taught the doctrines of transmigration of souls and the successive incarnations of the Deity. With these were associated social doctrines advocating community of women and the equal distribution of property. In the middle of the sixteenth century there was in the Punjab a revival of these doctrines headed by Bayazid, an Ansari Shaikh. The sect founded by Bayazid flourished during the reigns of Akbar, Jehangir and Shah Jahan. The Afghans and the Pathans living in the regions between Kabul and the Indus, especially around the Khyber Pass, showed at that time considerable restlessness which affected their religion as well as their social and political life. The sect became known as the Roshaniyah, because of the title *Pir Roshan* which its founder, Miyan Bayazid Ansari, adopted for himself. This title means 'Guide of Light'. But Bayazid had a rival in the person of Akhand Darwaza, who dubbed him *Pir i Tarik*, which means 'Guide of Darkness'. The Mughals enemies of Bayazid, derisively referred to him by that title and called his followers *Tarikis*.

Bayazid Ansari was born about the year 1525 or 1526 at Jullundur in the Punjab. But his father Abdulla was compelled for some reason to flee with his family to his ancestral home at Kaniguram in Waziristan where Bayazid grew up. His childhood was a very hard one. His father divorced the mother of Bayazid and the boy was neglected by his father and ill treated by his step mother so he was driven to seek the protection of an obscure kinsman Sheikh Ismail much to the dismay and anger of his father.

When still in his teens, Bayazid became an itinerant horse dealer. On his journeys he met an Ismaili heretic, Mulla Sulayman, and became his disciple. Bayazid also had dealings with Hindu Jogis who initiated him into the doctrine of metempsychosis or transmigration of souls. He also adopted other tenets of the Hindus, their pantheism, for instance.

In common with all Muslim founders of new sects, Bayazid claimed to be the messenger of God. He retired to a cave near Kaniguram, devoted himself to religious exercises and passed through several stages of austerities which he imposed upon himself. He assumed the title *Pir Roshan* or *Miyan Roshan*, and issued a call to the people to join his way of life. He claimed to have received direct revelations from God, and that the archangel Gabriel had descended to him. He therefore assumed the role of prophet, and in this capacity ordered his adherents to practise religious austerities.

At first his teaching found no favour among the Wazirs. Bayazid was attacked and wounded by his own father. Hardly had his wound healed when he fled to Nangrahar where he found a welcome with Sultan Ahmad, the Mohmand chief. Backed by the Sultan his following grew rapidly in numbers, and he established his authority in the regions of the Sulayman Hills and the Khyber. Later he found ardent supporters among the Ghoris, the Khalifs and Muhammadzais who had recently overrun the Peshawar plain of Hashtnagar.

Bayazid took up residence at Kalidhar from where he sent out his followers on marauding expeditions, much money was required for the support of his followers. These robberies roused Muhammad Hakim's government to action and Bayazid was arrested, taken to Kabul and confronted with the Ulemas of the court. Bayazid seems to have offered a large sum by way of ransom whereby the Ulemas were moved to intercede for him. Bayazid was released and went to Tirah where he was well received and found a home.

The doctrines of Pir Roshan show an intimate relationship with Sufi and Ismailian as well as Hindu doctrines. His teachings can be traced back to the Ravendis and similar sects. Pir Roshan taught that nothing exists but God, that he fills all space and is the substratum of all beings. 'God, said he, 'remains concealed in the human nature like salt in water, or grain in the plant, he is the same in all his creatures, and the Lord of all, since nothing exists but God, what meaning is to be assigned to such terms as right and wrong, good and bad, excepting that every man should implicitly obey his religious instructor?'

'Behold now,' he added, 'I am both your god and your prophet

There is therefore nothing which you can do so meritorious as to obey my commands. If you fulfil them I will restore you after death to the forms of men, if not you shall be degraded to the forms of hogs and bears, and those who obstinately oppose me shall be utterly annihilated.

He totally denied the doctrine of a future state and directed his perfect disciples to indulge their pleasures without restraint and to gratify their inclinations without scruple. He assured them they had nothing to do with ordinances or prohibitions of the law, and that whatever was acquired by violence robbery, or the edge of the scimitar, was lawful.

Those who reject the teachings of Pir Roshan are like brute animals to kill whom is in all cases lawful and in some cases meritorious. Persons who refuse to accept the teachings of the Pir are like dead persons without heirs and their property may therefore be plundered at pleasure by all true believers without any pangs of a bad conscience.

Bayazid preached communism of property and laid on his followers the obligation of a periodical distribution of tribal lands (*resh*). His followers are said to have practised community of women also but this may have been alleged merely to discredit Pir Roshan's sect. It is a usual accusation with many heretical teachers.

It is obvious that such teachings must sooner or later come into conflict with the established government which in Pir Roshan's time was the Mughal government but as long as the movement remained within its religious and social confines Akbar, the then Mughal Emperor did not interfere with it he even received Bayazid's son Jalal ud Din Ansari at his court.

But Pir Roshan had no intention of restricting himself to religion. As soon as he had prepared his followers ideologically he trained them in the use of arms and taking up residence in the mountains began to plunder merchants levy contributions and propagate his doctrines extensively by the sword compelling the people to join his ranks. He extended his sway over a wide area and struck terror even into princes. When he had reason to suspect the Tirahts of backsliding from his tenets and intriguing with the Mughals he expelled them from Tirah. He had 300 of them murdered treacherously the rest fled to Nangrahar.

Bayazid had for some time such a series of successes that he had the audacity to descend from his ravines to meet the royal troops on the plains. But when he tried to block the Kabul and Indus passes to Afghanistan, and to harass the Mughals in every way, the governor of Kabul, Muhsin Khan, sent his troops against Pir Roshan. His luck turned soon afterwards, he was caught in the Peshawar district, but he managed to escape. He pursued the Tirahis to Nangrahar, but was repulsed by Muhsin Khan and lost many men in a great slaughter. This defeat took place at Baro which the Roshaniyahs had sacked. Again Bayazid escaped. He fled to a village in Kalapani where he fell sick and died, more from fatigue and vexation, it was said, than from any disease. For some time faith in his name, and the confidence he had inspired, survived him. His bones were exhumed, and borne as precious relics by the Roshaniyahs at the head of their marching columns.

After some time the sect began to miss his dynamic leadership and many followers left. Its most active supporters remained the Afridis of Tirah, but the Yusufzais reverted to Muslim orthodoxy. However, when Bayazid's youngest son, Jalal ud-Din, succeeded to the command, the sect again revived and became so formidable that the governor of Kabul did not dare to attack it. By the year 1586 the Roshaniyahs had again become a constant menace to the Mughal Government and to peace and order in the frontier regions. They had closed both the roads between Kabul and the Indus and besieged Peshawar as well. The result was that the Mughals were completely cut off from Central Asia.

This could not be tolerated. At last Akbar felt compelled to send a force against the Roshaniyahs to bring them into submission, but the first imperial army was cut to pieces, and one of his generals and many of the chiefs were slain in the mountains of Swat. With alternating fortunes Jalal ud Din was able for a while to maintain independence but in 1587 another army was sent against him and the rebel leader was defeated.

There was no more trouble till 1600 when Jalal ud Din, grandson of Bayazid obtained possession for a time of Ghazni, and in 1611 the Roshaniyahs caused a revolution in Kabul which was put down with great severity. The result was that the sect died out at Kabul, while it survived in Tirah and Kohat.

Jalal-ud-Din's sons received an estate near Agra and in future kept the peace.

Ihdad, another grandson of Bayazid, carried on the fight from Tirah, with changing fortunes, till he was killed in 1626. His head was sent to Jehangir and stuck on one of the gateways of Lahore. Ihdad's son, Abdul Qadir, and his beautiful wife Alai, who was beloved of all the Roshaniyahs, went into Tirah and continued the struggle. Finally they had to submit and were granted lands.

The Roshaniyah branch in Kurram, however, still fought on, but one after the other the leaders were killed either by the Mughal soldiers or by men of their own community who were tired of continuous warfare.

According to Dr. D. S. Margoliouth, remnants of the original Roshaniyah community were still in existence in 1936 in the Bangash region among the Afridis. They are still dreaming of their glorious past and of the aspirations of their forefathers for the establishment in those parts of a free and independent state.

Some descendants of Pir Roshan still live in Jullundur, and it is thought that the doctrines of the sect have greatly influenced Muslim beliefs throughout the North-West. A number of songs which commemorate the miracles of Shaikh Darwish and other members of the Pir Roshan family are still sung by *faqirs* in the Punjab.

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4. A HINDU MESSIAH IN NORTH INDIA

The pacification of North India by the British in the first decades of the nineteenth century threw back upon the territories of the East India Company a great number of military adventurers whose turbulence no longer found an outlet in the depredations and local wars that used to be common in North India. The bands of Maratha and Pathan mercenaries which in the past had

assimilated these adventurous spirits were dissolved, and the disbanded soldiers found no other suitable occupation. Neither the army nor police force would accept them, for they were usually devoid of all discipline and order.

It was, on the other hand, difficult for them to settle down to a peaceful life as cultivators or artisans, because the administration of civil justice was still defective; the police was largely ineffective and could give no proper protection, and the assessment of land revenue was very arbitrary and permitted the farmer no security in the enjoyment of the fruits of his labour.

This state of things produced a general discontent and insecurity; no wonder that here and there adventurous spirits found a willing ear when they set themselves up as leaders and promised their followers a carefree life and much loot. So far only one instance is known of a clever adventurer playing on the religious susceptibilities of the people and pretending to be inspired by God to lead them out of their difficult conditions.

At Badawar in Patiala State a religious mendicant pretended to be Kalki, the last of the Vishnu *avatars*, and the expected liberator of the Hindu masses and the inaugurator of a happy millennium. He announced that on an appointed day he would overturn the reign of the foreigners and set up his reign of a thousand years. The pretender was arrested. On the appointed day a lawless crowd headed by a body of Akalis collected to join the *avatar* of Vishnu and carry out his design. When they heard that the holy man was in jail they went to effect his rescue, but were met by a party of horsemen, despatched just at the right time by the Raja of Patiala. The rebels were attacked and easily dispersed. As there was no further sign of the pretender, the agitation died down.

5 MUFTI MUHAMMAD AIWAZ

It is rare that a man of repute and character is forced by public acclaim and circumstances to assume the role of a Messiah. It happened once in North India, in 1816 at Bareilly.

The events leading up to this movement were as follows. In 1816, at Bareilly, to the usual agrarian grievances was added the imposition of a tax for the maintenance of the municipal police. This tax was exacted with a severity which excited the people. Mufti Muhammad Aiwaz, a grand old man held in veneration throughout Rohilkhand, took up the cause of the oppressed.

The immediate cause of the rising was a wound inflicted on a woman by the police while they were setting out for the collection of the tax. In the scuffle which ensued, several rioters were killed and the Mufti himself received a slight injury. The injury to the person of the Mufti was more than the Muslims could bear, 'sacrilege had been added to exaction.

The Mufti enraged by the indignity which he had suffered, returned to his sanctuary at Shahdara. There he unfurled the green flag of Islam and appealed to Mohammedans to take revenge. His action evoked a tremendous enthusiasm among the Muslim masses. The leaven of religious discontent infected the people to such an extent that they became impatient for action in defence of their insulted religion, the question of tax fell into the background.

The Mufti must have forwarded communications to the surrounding districts because in the course of two days vast numbers of armed Muslims particularly from the town of Pilibhit where there was the greatest tension and Shahjahanpur and Rampur flocked to the standard for the defence of the faith and of the Mufti. They were armed with swords and matchlocks. Their number was variously estimated at five or fifteen thousand.

On 21 April the insurgents murdered the son of an Englishman and outflanked the sepoys in an open engagement. The forces of the magistrate under Captain Boscawen and Lieutenant Lucas being inadequate the 2nd Battalion of the 13th N I under Captain Cunningham and Major Richards were hurried into Bareilly.

After initial setbacks the British forces defeated the rebels. More than three hundred of them were killed and a greater

number wounded and taken prisoner. On the British side twenty-one were killed and sixty-two wounded.

After this encounter the movement broke down, and nothing more was heard of it.

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6 THE WAHABI MOVEMENT

A puritanical Muslim sect was founded during the eighteenth century in Arabia by Muhammad Abd ul-Wahab to attack the religious corruptions that had crept into Muslim religion and society. It was the aim of the sect to restore Islam to its pristine purity. The doctrines professed by this sect were favourably received by many orthodox Mohammedans in India who had been worried by new ideas and practices which converts from Hinduism had brought over into their new faith and were considered contrary to the spirit of Islam. Various Muslim leaders arose in the nineteenth century in North India and Bengal who propagated the Wahabi doctrines and fought for the purity of the Muslim faith, but no movement was more successful than that of Sayyid Ahmad of Rae Bareilly (1782-1831).

The Wahabi movement in India which began the Islamic regeneration by fighting against internal decay and abuses in society and creed did not stop at this inner reform. It also aimed at the restoration of Muslim political power which at that time had reached the lowest level. Many such movements, consequently, starting as purely religious reform movements, gradually turned into armed revolutionary agitations, first against the Sikhs in the Punjab and then against the British.

Doubtless, there was a strong feeling of Millenarianism in this desire for Muslim supremacy in India. It was supported and nourished by the conviction that by the restoration of the pristine purity of Islam and establishment of Muslim rule in India, an 'ideal society' or a kind of paradise on earth would finally result. Sayyid Ahmad, the founder of the most important of the Wahabi movements in India, pursued both these objectives: the inner regeneration of Muslim faith and society, and the restoration of Muslim political power in India.

Whether he evolved his own doctrines independently or whether he was from the beginning inspired by Wahabi ideas is not certain. In fact, his movement differs in some important respects from the Wahabi movement in Arabia. He may have received his reforming inspirations from his religious teacher, the pious and learned Shah Abd ul Aziz of Delhi, son of the famous Shah Wali Ullah Dehlevi.

Sayid Ahmad was a man of humble origin and was born in 1782 or 1786. He is said to have spent his youth as a freebooter and outlaw in the service of the Pindari leader Amir Khan who later became the Nawab of Tonk. However, Sayid Ahmad was converted. He abandoned his life of lawlessness and in 1816 became a disciple of Shah Abd ul Aziz of Delhi. Three years of apprenticeship turned him into a powerful preacher who zealously criticized the abuses that had been introduced into Muslim faith and society.

The intense zeal and remarkable success that later attended the preaching of the former outlaw indicate an unusual personality. Combined with this strong personal force were other elements that contributed to the interest that was aroused. He was lineally descended from the Prophet Mohammed himself. A man of intensely nervous temperament, which he concealed under an outward show of calm, he was probably an epileptic. At that time it was the common opinion in the East that such fits were states of trance or ecstasy, in which the afflicted persons communed with the Deity. Sayid Ahmad himself declared that he communed during these fits with God and the Apostles. In dreams the beloved daughter of Mohammed and her husband—his lineal ancestor—visited him, saluted him as their son, bathed him in sweet essences, and arrayed him in royal apparel. Further more, his disciples saw in his grave, taciturn and gentle demeanour and even in his person, much that reminded them of their Prophet and this attracted them.

In 1820, when Sayid Ahmad started on his mission he was about twenty four years old, a little above middle height and with a very long beard. In his preachings he used illustrations from the everyday life of his listeners, and abstained from all doctrinal discussions either, as his enemies said, because he was ill fitted to talk on them or, as his disciples affirmed, because they were below his high order of piety.

That was not all. Behind this strong personality lay the ancient popular belief in the coming of the promised 'Imam Mahdi', who was to rise in the last days and lead the faithful in a last great crusade against the infidels. Two of Saiyid Ahmad's first converts were men of profound scholarship, brought up amid the discussions of the Delhi sage, 'The Sun of India' (Shah Abd ul-Aziz), under whom the new prophet had passed his novitiate.

These two men, versed equally well in the Sacred Language and the Sacred Law, accepted their illiterate co-disciple, the former bandit, as a man sent by God to accomplish the task of the religious and political revival of Islam in India. The veneration with which these two learned and polished Doctors of the Law publicly treated Saiyid Ahmad, who possessed a bare smattering of Arabic, first attracted public attention to the future prophet. With profound knowledge of Islamic literature they supported the theory that Saiyid Ahmad was the promised Imam Mahdi who was to precede the final coming of Christ. So insistent were they that he himself finally yielded to their arguments, and assumed the titles, dignities, and authority appertaining to such a distinguished personage. To a certain extent, Saiyid Ahmad's movement had much in common with the Mahdavi movements already described.

Since the events amid which his career began could in no way be reconciled with the popular conception of this last struggle between good and evil, the two Doctors of the Law boldly attacked the established belief and asserted that the true Imam Mahdi was to come, not on the Last Day, but as an intermediate leader half way between the death of Mohammed and the end of the world, which they calculated to be the thirteenth century of their era (1786-1886), Saiyid Ahmad was born in 1786¹.

Prophecies were unearthed which proved that Saiyid Ahmad was the expected Imam Mahdi. He would lead the Muslims to victory after a battle of four days ending in the complete overthrow of the infidels. These events were to be heralded by eclipses of *the sun and the moon in the month of Ramzan*.

But Saiyid Ahmad not only designated himself the Imam Mahdi, he deviated from orthodox Sunni faith by accommodating the Shi'ahs who follow various Imams, and by creating a new

assumed the character of a triumphal procession as he advanced slowly southward towards Bihar. The fame of his piety and resolution of purpose travelled ahead of him, and wherever he went the Muslim population thronged to his meetings anxious to enrol themselves as his followers. His fervent disciples and converts rendered him menial service in acknowledgement of his spiritual dignity, and men of rank and learning ran like common servants barefoot, by the side of his palanquin.

When he entered Patna, the capital of Bihar, Saiyid Ahmad was received with great honour by one of the leading Muslims of the town, Vilayet Ali, and his family. He remained for a long time at Patna, preaching and enrolling candidates into his movement, and then proceeded to Calcutta where his reception exceeded all expectations. The masses flocked to him in such numbers that the general procedure of admittance into his movement by personal touch had to be abandoned and new followers were accepted simply by touching his unrolled turban. In this way many could be enrolled at the same time. This tour of the new prophet took place in 1820.

But no Muslim leader could consider himself fully qualified for his task without a pilgrimage to Mecca. Therefore in 1822 Saiyid Ahmad sailed from Calcutta to Mecca (*haj*) and afterwards took the opportunity of travelling widely in Arabia and Syria, where he must have met many Wahabi reformers. He returned to India, more disgusted than ever with the abuses and impurities which he found all over Muslim India largely as a result of contact with Hinduism. Inspired by the zeal and fervour of the Muslims in the countries he had just visited he again began to preach this time at Bombay, centering his attacks on these abuses seeking to free Islam from Hindu corruptions.

After some time Saiyid Ahmad returned to Patna where his preaching was as successful as before. He gained so many new disciples that it became imperative to introduce a regular organization. In consequence he appointed four spiritual deputy leaders (*khalifas*) Vilayet Ali his brother Inayet Ali Shah Muhammad Husain and Farhat Husain. The Patna *khalifas* have been praised for their high character missionary zeal and supreme devotion to their cause. Much of their teaching was faultless writes the British historian W. W. Hunter, and it has

been given to them to stir up thousands of their countrymen to a purer and truer conception of the Almighty

A great number of regional and local leaders were placed under these four *khalifas* who were charged not only with the guidance and supervision of the followers in the districts towns and villages but with the hiring of recruits for training as soldiers for his future campaigns

Sayid Ahmad urgently required ample funds for his movement He appointed a number of agents to collect during his long itineraries a tax from the profits of trade in all the large towns which lay on his route He assumed the authority of spiritual and temporal command over his co-religionists and, following the example of the Muslim emperors issued numerous *farmans* (orders)

Sayid Ahmad was continuously on the move, he toured the districts of Upper India untiringly and thus enrolled a large number of disciples Within the short period of six or seven years his influence spread over two thousand square miles of thickly populated area from the Peshawar frontier to the delta of Bengal

Gradually, however the movement took a more political turn and Sayid Ahmad declared the country *Daru l harb* (enemy country) and thus placed before the Muslims the alternative either of waging war against the non Muslim rulers of India (*Jihad*) or migrating to some Muslim country which was free from foreign domination If for some unavoidable reasons his followers had to live under British rule they should make all possible efforts to overthrow it

Sayid Ahmad seemed to have fully realized that it was the British traders who formed the main obstacle to Muslim rule in India and that a thorough preparation was needed to drive them out He began his agitation against the British with the distribution of pamphlets urging the members of his sect to unite as one body and carry on a relentless crusade against the infidels for the conquest of India For this purpose Sayid Ahmad took steps to train his followers in the use of arms and he himself in soldier's kit held military parades

Before commencing the fight against the British he decided to take on and finish off the Sikhs He believed that this would be an easier task and would at the same time provide excellent training for the future and more difficult war against the British

To enlist the support of the frontier tribes for this purpose Saiyid Ahmad proceeded to the North West Frontier Province and Afghanistan accompanied by the Patna Maulvis. In a pamphlet issued to incite the tribes to religious war, he called the Sikh rulers oppressors who had killed thousands of Muslims and forbidden the call to prayer from the mosques and the killing of cows.

The Apostle assured them that those who died in the holy war would instantly go to heaven as martyrs of the Faith. Those who survived would return loaded with booty. The Pathan tribes responded to his appeal with frantic enthusiasm. These turbulent and most superstitious of all Muslim races were only too delighted to get a chance of plundering their Sikh neighbours under the sanction of religion.

On his way to Afghanistan at the gate of Kandahar Saiyid Ahmad was given a rousing reception by the Afghan nobles and masses of that city. In Kandahar as well as in Kabul he received an enthusiastic response to his call for war against the Sikhs. At one time the strength of his volunteer army swelled to a hundred thousand men. The Afghan ruler diplomatically denied his association with Saiyid Ahmad though he permitted him to make large scale preparations in his country for a war in the Punjab.

When the fighting began Saiyid Ahmad was far from successful in his campaign against the Sikhs. The Sikhs defended themselves well and both sides massacred mercilessly but gradually the Muslims gained ground and in 1829 Peshawar was in danger. The Governor plotted the poisoning of the Prophet in order to end the war. The rumour inflamed the Muslims to such a fury that they erupted from their hills into the plains massacred a Sikh army and slew its general. By the end of 1830 Peshawar fell into the hands of Saiyid Ahmad. At once he had coins struck in his own name like an emperor — Ahmad the Just Defender of the Faith the glitter of whose scimitar scatters destruction among the infidels. But soon dissensions broke out between his unruly Afghan soldiers and his Indian followers which resulted in pitched battles. Many were killed on both sides. During this fratricidal fight the Sikhs succeeded in regaining Peshawar by ransom and finally in a battle at Balakot in 1831 Saiyid Ahmad himself lost his life.

The death of Saiyid Ahmad was naturally a great blow to the movement, and the Patna *khalifas* had to resort to a clever stratagem to remove the immediate danger of despondency among the Wahabis. Vilayet Ali gave out that Saiyid Ahmad had not been killed but had retired into seclusion and would appear at the proper time to lead the army of the 'faithful' to victory. Vilayet Ali had three figures stuffed with straw to represent Saiyid Ahmad and his attendants; and these he put up near a cave in the mountains. Doubting followers were brought to a place to look at the dummies from a distance.

By thus keeping alive the hope of Saiyid Ahmad's return, the collapse of the Wahabi movement was averted. Indeed, the Patna *khalifas* were fully capable of leading the movement themselves without Saiyid Ahmad. While the two brothers Vilayet and Inayet Ali preached in Kabul and the Frontier Provinces, Shah Muhammad put the sect on a sound footing in Bengal and Bihar, where he opened a number of branches in important places. Vilayet Ali was later deputed to recruit new members in Hyderabad (Deccan), Central Provinces and Bombay. While he had but little success in Bombay, he gained a number of followers in Hyderabad including the ruler's brother, Nawab Mubariz-ud-Daulah. Some years later the Nawab was apprehended for anti-state activities and sentenced for his attempts to overthrow his brother and wage war against the British. He was confined to Golconda fort where he died in 1854. Ten of his principal associates were also confined in prison for more than ten years.

Taking advantage of the political chaos in the Punjab after the death of the Sikh leader Ranjit Singh in 1839, the Wahabis occupied a large territory along the left bank of the river Sindhu. But when the British established their rule in the Punjab in 1847 the Wahabis were driven out of the Punjab. After the sudden death of Vilayet Ali, his brother took charge. Previously there had been some controversy between the two brothers about the date of a rising against the British. Vilayet Ali had made a good evaluation of British military strength and consequently advised longer preparations for a war. Inayet Ali was all for immediate war. When the latter assumed charge of the movement after the death of his brother he at once stepped

up recruitment on a grand scale and started openly agitating for revolt in North India and Bengal. The British were not aware of the dangerous situation since the police were in league with the rebels. Sedition was preached among the native troops too.

The war broke out when Inayet Ali attacked the pro British ruler of Amb in 1853. In the encounter with the British who came to his assistance the Wahabis suffered heavy casualties. It was with great difficulty that Inayet Ali escaped capture or even death.

He had learned his lesson however. Henceforth he adopted the policy of his brother. Regular military training was imparted to recruits and there was plenty of mental indoctrination through songs extolling the glories of *juhad*. In 1857 Inayet Ali was able to defeat the British near Naringi and to carry off a large amount of booty which was distributed among the soldiers. While Inayet Ali was preparing for another campaign the Mutiny of 1857 broke out in full fury and his sources of supply from Patna were cut off. He had no intention of assisting the Hindus in their fight against the British and remained passive but in the following year he fell ill and died in March 1858.

It is indeed strange that this violently anti British Wahabi movement kept aloof from the great revolutionary movement of 1857. The Wahabis certainly could have rendered valuable service to the cause of the Mutiny had they joined forces with the rebels. The only satisfactory solution to this puzzle is that the Wahabis favoured a purely Islamic movement and would not co-operate with the Hindus whom they hated as much as the British. Only a few individual Wahabis joined the mutineers but wherever they did so they raised the flag of Islam.

After the collapse of the Mutiny the Wahabis renewed their revolutionary activities and attacked the British at various places. Between 1850 and 1863 no less than twenty separate expeditions involving sixty thousand regular troops besides irregular auxiliaries and police had to be sent against the Wahabis. Weakened by the Mutiny the British troops were never strong enough to crush the Wahabis decisively.

Finally the British Government decided to strike at the root of the movement by prosecuting systematically its main leaders. Between 1864 and 1871 there were five great State trials as a

result of which a number of prominent Muslims were charged with the offence of waging war against the Queen or aiding and abetting it. Among them were many leading Wahabis who were prosecuted and sentenced to transportation for life or long periods of imprisonment. In consequence of these trials and severe sentences the Wahabi movement was thoroughly and finally crushed in India.

At the instigation of the then Viceroy, Lord Mayo the Wahabi movement was discredited by eminent Muftis of Mecca and learned doctors of Muslim law in North India, who declared that the Wahabis were wrong in declaring India *Daru l harb* (enemy country). This way of dealing with the Wahabi movement was perhaps more effective for its final extinction than State trials and severe jail sentences.

The Wahabi movement in its early days had been a purely religious one confined to a section of the Muslim community particularly to the lower middle classes. As a religious movement it did not attract a great following especially after the death of its founder Saiyid Ahmad and might not have long survived it but for the political character it assumed in the meanwhile. It was primarily due to its political role that the movement enlisted the sympathies and even the active support of the general Muslim populace. A perusal of the various State trials would be quite revealing in this respect. Among the convicted persons we find representatives of every rank of Muslim society priests of the highest class wealthy merchants soldiers preachers and people belonging to the lower strata of society such as butchers scavengers peasants etc. It was mainly due to this general sympathetic attitude of the entire Muslim community towards the religious and political aspirations of the Wahabis that it became difficult for the British authorities to unearth the conspiracy and find witnesses to depose against the rebels. These were men so popular and held in such high esteem that no Muslim was willing to testify to any of their seditious acts. The few who were traitors were silently yet completely boycotted by their community. Such was the popularity of the leaders of the movement that in spite of its best endeavours persuasions and intimidations the Government found it impossible to sell the confiscated property of the convicted persons.

The Hindus in general it is true, were suspicious about the motives and objectives of the movement which, though it was in its early stages directed mainly against the Sikh rulers, proclaimed religious *jihad* against all 'infidels'. The forceful Wahabi denunciation of accretions to Islam (which were practically all borrowings from Hinduism) as abominable adulterations of the true faith was another cause of possible annoyance. As V. Smith writes 'It did encourage communal attitudes especially in religious thinking, and left a considerable section of the Muslim masses more susceptible to later communalistic propaganda than they might otherwise have been'.

The organizers of the Wahabi movement, which aimed at the destruction of British power in India and the establishment of an Islamic State, never came into open conflict with the Hindus.

The movement, however, assumed the character of a class struggle in some places, especially in Bengal, where it was accompanied by furious uprisings of peasants against their landlords irrespective of communal distinctions. The well to do Muslims and every mullah or priest of a shrine with a few acres of land attached to it decried the Wahabi agitation and issued *fatwas* against it.

The Wahabi movement was not confined to Bengal, Bihar, Punjab, North West Frontier Province and Madras. In the Deccan, too, the people were stirred to such a pitch of enthusiasm that the women are said to have sold their jewels and devoted the proceeds to the support of the movement.

In spite of its widespread character and the great enthusiasm it evoked, the Wahabi movement cannot be regarded as a national movement. It was a movement of the Muslims by the Muslims and for the Muslims. The Hindus as a class held severely aloof though a few individuals here and there might have felt some sort of passive, or occasionally even active sympathy for it. Their number was, however, very insignificant and not a single Hindu figured prominently in this great movement extending over a considerable part of India for nearly half a century.

The Wahabis were undoubtedly inspired by the motive to free India from British rule and earlier of Sikh rule but their struggle was not one for securing freedom for India but for the re-establishment of Muslim supremacy. The history of the Wahabi

movement, as described above, clearly shows that even the most widespread and well-organized movement for driving out the British need not always be taken as a national war of independence. For the Wahabis, the British were simply non-Muslims who had usurped a Muslim kingdom, and the Wahabis would, as they actually did, fight against any non-Muslim power in India with the same zeal as they showed against the British, if the security of Muslim religion demanded it.

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7 THE KUKA MOVEMENT

The Kuka Movement of the Sikhs in the Punjab shows a striking resemblance to that of the Wahabis. Both began as an attempt to restore the original purity of religion — Islam in the first case, Sikhism in the second — and both drifted into a political movement with the common object of driving out the British. The methods of organization were quite similar.

The Kuka Movement — the term 'Kuka' derives from *kuk*, a shriek or cry — was probably founded in Western Punjab in the forties of the nineteenth century by Bhagat Jawhar Mal, better known as Sian Sahib, shortly before the British conquest of the province. Its aim was the reform of the Sikh religion by the removal of the abuses and superstitions that had crept into it, such as caste distinctions, enforcement of rigorous penance for widows and the worship of idols, tombs and ascetics. The Sikh religion was to be purified of these Hindu practices.

Sian Sahib and his disciple Balak Singh, gathered a band of followers around them with headquarters at Hazro in Attock in the North Western Frontier Province. Balak Singh recruited many adherents in the Sikh garrison of the fort of Hazro.

Govind Singh was proclaimed as the only true teacher (*guru*). The reformers prohibited all worship save the reading of the 'Granth', forbade the employment of Brahmins at weddings and other ceremonies, and in general tried to eliminate Brahmmin influence on the Sikhs. They strove to revive in many other

ways the original doctrines of the Sikh faith. Caste restrictions and taboos on inter-marriage were again to be abolished, consumption of meat, liquor and drugs permitted, and comparatively free social relations between men and women were to be restored. The sectaries carried staves in their hands, tied their turbans in a peculiar fashion, wore a necklace of woollen cord tied in knots, and had a watchword known only among themselves.

A change came over the Kukas after the conquest of the Punjab by the British. Then the chief item on their programme became the restoration of Sikh sovereignty. Their ideas of religious reform receded into the background and, according to some accounts, they soon returned to their former religious laxity.

On Balak Singh's death in 1863, his nephew Khan Singh succeeded to the leadership of the sect, retaining a certain number of followers in the locality whose doctrines were kept secret. Balak Singh's teaching was, however, taken up by Ram Singh, a carpenter of Bhaini Ala in Ludhiana. He soon assumed the leadership of the sect. He had previously served in the army of the Sikh ruler, Naro Nihal Singh.

He was reputed to have been initiated into magic by a Muslim woman. According to local legend Ram Singh the carpenter was building a house at Hazro for a Sayyid (Muslim of the highest rank) when he found that he had cut a beam too short. The Sayyid's daughter bade him try again, he did so and found that it had grown too long. From her he learnt the words of power which had enabled her to lengthen the beam. These words were "*Ha ah guru!*" or according to others, "*Allah hu al samad!*" Ram Singh's final ruin was attributed to his having revealed this watchword too freely to his followers.

Placing stronger emphasis on the political objectives of the sect, Ram Singh was able to recruit in a short time a large number of followers, chiefly from the Jats and many lower castes. He declared himself to be an incarnation of Guru Govind Singh, and preached the revival of the Khalsa and the overthrow of the British Government.

Ram Singh divided the Punjab into districts, each under an agent, who bore the Muslim title of *suba* and was under his direct control. His followers were all called *kukas* or 'shouters' because, unlike other Sikhs, they used to fall into a state of frenzy (*ward*)

in 1870 with the help of the Maharaja. The Kukas were believed to have preached their doctrines among the native forces, and to have enlisted themselves in the armies of the native princes. There was, however, no authentic evidence for these rumours. In any case the Kukas were watched closely and special precautions were taken from time to time to prevent large gatherings of them.

The main activities on which the Kukas concentrated before 1871 were the destruction of shrines and idols in various localities of the Punjab and the murder of butchers and others whom they suspected of slaughtering cattle. When the British conquered the Punjab they promised to enforce the Sikh Darbar's prohibition of cow-slaughter. This promise was not kept. Cattle were killed and beef was openly sold in markets. To stop the work of the butchers became a principal tenet of the Kukas and the organized plan to murder the butchers brought them into conflict with the authorities.

The establishment of a public slaughter-house near one of the gates of the Golden Temple at Amritsar was the first provocation for the Kukas. When, furthermore, butchers were found to have thrown bones into a Hindu well, the Kukas rose and murdered four butchers and wounded three others. Soon they made another raid, and at Raikot in Ludhiana district they killed three butchers and wounded thirteen. It is generally believed that Ram Singh, the leader, had no hand in these crimes, and that his followers murdered the butchers of cattle simply because they believed they were earning spiritual merit thereby. Consequently, although nine Kukas were executed and two transported for life for these crimes, no legal action could be taken against Ram Singh. The trial did not disclose any complicity on his part.

However, although Ram Singh was absolved of any suspicion of having had a hand in these raids on the butchers, he and some of his chief followers were interned in their villages and kept under strict surveillance. A body of police was posted at Bhaini. These restrictions were partially removed in 1866.

In January 1872 there was another outbreak of religious frenzy among the Kukas. After a meeting at Bhaini, a band of about one hundred and fifty Kukas started off on a raid under the leadership of two Jats of Patiala State. Ram Singh seems to have disapproved of this action for he informed the police of their

to him for trial. But Mr Cowan cold bloodedly completed the execution, the remaining prisoners were blown from the guns. Later the Commissioner wrote to Mr Cowan to say that he had acted 'admirably'. But the Government of India took another view and held that the execution was not justifiable on the ground of an emergency which had actually ceased when it took place that good faith could not be pleaded as an excuse for an indiscriminate and unlawful execution, that the moral effect of such proceedings on the Indian population would be bad unless an example were set, and that the officer must be removed from the service of the Government. Even this dismissal must be considered a very lenient punishment for such an atrocious action!

Though Ram Singh had disowned the band of his followers responsible for the outrages at Maludh and Kotla and informed the police of their activities he was accused of complicity, sentenced and deported to Rangoon. He remained a state prisoner until his death in 1888. His followers refused to believe that he had died and still entertain the hope that one day he will reappear. Ram Singh's brother Budh Singh inherited the *dera* (settlement of Ram Singh).

Around 1910 the sect adopted the name *Namdharis*. They are not exactly a religious order. They revere the *San Sakhi*, a book which professes to be the written report of a conversation between Sahib Singh and Gurbaksh Singh on the sayings and doings of Govind Singh the tenth Guru of the Sikhs. They also have a shrine at Durga near Nawashahr in Jullundur in honour of Guru Tegh Bahadur.

At present the Kuka Movement is unimportant and devoid of influence. There is hardly any doubt that the rash action of a small group of fanatics among the Kukas undertaken in direct defiance of their leader was mainly responsible for the downfall of a once strong and dangerous movement.

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8 THE AHMADIYA MOVEMENT

A very dynamic and militant messianic movement, that of the *Ahmadiyas*, arose in the eighties of the last century in the Punjab. It set itself the task of combating the superstitions and corruptions which had crept into North Indian Islam and of revitalizing the rather lethargic sons of the Prophet by a new interpretation of the Islamic faith and a vigorous activation of its proselytizing spirit. This movement was stirred into life largely by the striking success of a Christian (Protestant) Mission in the Central Punjab and the agitation of the Hindu reformer Dayananda Saraswati and his Arya Samaj.

In the village of Qadian in the Gurdaspur District of eastern Punjab some thirty five miles from Amritsar, lived an ancient Muslim family tracing its descent from Mirza Hadi Beg a Mughal nobleman said to have come with Babar from Samarkand. Appointed a Qazi (magistrate) over seventy villages he later laid the foundation of the town of Qadian in East Punjab. This family had long been known for its attachment to the Sufi mysticism of Islam. Into this family in or about 1838 a boy was born who became known in later life as Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Very little is known about his youth or education so it is not possible to trace the development of his mind.

It was in 1879 that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad began to claim that he had received a divine revelation. Convinced that it was his duty to propagate this divine revelation among all the nations of the world he sat down and wrote a book *Burhan-i-Ahmediya* published in 1880. In it he declared himself to be the Christian Messiah as well as the Mohammedan Mahdi. In March 1889 he formally established a new sect of which he became undisputed head.

He claimed to be in the possession of all the truths contained in the three main religions of India—Islam, Hinduism and Christianity, combining in his person the threefold role of a Mahdi, the Christian Messiah and of an incarnation (*avatar*) of Vishnu.² In fact he wanted to appear before the public as the promised prophet of all the religions of the world.

² This claim he made only towards the end of his life. It was so offensive even to his closest followers that it was quietly dropped by them.

The conception of such claims was rather unusual for a Muslim, for, according to ordinary Mohammedan belief Christianity and Islam, and Hinduism, are completely exclusive of each other.

It seems almost that to begin with Mirza Ghulam Ahmad had come to believe himself to be the Christian Messiah nearly the whole of his apologetic is built up with the object of proving himself that

The idea that he was also the Mahdi appears to have been added on as a sort of inference from his special position in Islam. As the common Muslim expectation was that the Mahdi would be a man of violence and blood, this character could hardly be combined with the idea of the Christian Messiah but Mirza got over this difficulty by declaring that the traditions which speak of the Mahdi as a man of violence were all forgeries and that the 'Guided One', i.e. the Mahdi was to be a man of peace. But the controlling conception of himself as a prophet was basically the character and work of Christ.

However, he did not pretend to be Jesus Christ returned *in propria persona*. He merely claimed to possess the spirit and power of Christ and to be the fulfilment of the prophecy of the Second Coming of Christ. He used two series of arguments to try to make this claim seem reasonable.

He first set about proving that Jesus did not die on the Cross, rise from the dead and ascend into heaven. He asserted that the Gospels had deliberately been corrupted by the Christians. He averred that, while Jesus was truly crucified, he was taken down from the cross seemingly dead but really in a swoon recovered from his wounds, came to India, lived for many years in Kashmir like any ordinary mortal and finally died there. The Mirza identified the tomb of Yus Asaf in Srinagar as the place where Jesus Christ lies buried.

Lastly he asserted that Christianity was spiritually dead and argued that if Jesus had really risen from the grave and ascended into heaven, to reign there in spiritual power, his Church would exhibit more of his energy and life. Since the Christians resemble their redeemer so little in their life and doings we could infer that he did not rise from the dead.

It ought to be noticed that in denying the ascension of Christ, the Mirza separates himself from the traditional belief of Islam,

for the Muslims believe that God took Christ to heaven, that He is now there, and that He will return to the earth at the end of the world to slay the Anti-Christ

After having thus dealt with the first series of arguments for his claims, Ghulam Ahmad proceeded to give positive proofs for his assertion that he himself was the Messiah

He reasoned as follows. As the Old Testament prophecy of the Second Coming of Elias was fulfilled in John the Baptist, who was not Elias, so the New Testament prophecy of the Second Coming of Christ will be fulfilled, not by a personal return of Jesus, but by the appearance of one coming in the spirit and power of Jesus, namely, himself

The Mirza also made a special appeal to the Muslims. The Koran, he asserted, was the repository of all knowledge, but on account of certain corrupt practices, Islam too had lost its old vigour. He, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, had been sent by God to reform it and to restore Islam to its old glory

He proved this claim in the following manner. In the Koran, Christ's prophecy of the coming of the Comforter is referred to. The Greek word in John 16, 1 is *parakletos*, advocate, defender, comforter. The Mirza seems to have got this word mixed up with the similar Greek word *periclytos*, which means famous, and took it as a prophecy of his own name, which, whether in the form Mohammed or Ahmad, means 'praised', 'glorified'

Our prophet made little of the fact that his own name was not Ahmad, but Ghulam Ahmad, i.e. the servant of Ahmad (Mohammed). The Mirza used it as several other self-styled prophets of the name of Ahmad have done, as a definite prophecy of himself

He based another argument on the doctrine of the millennium taught in the Apocalypse. Counting by lunar years, he divided the time since the appearance of Jesus into two millenia, and made his own appearance the beginning of the third. The first was the millennium of the devil's imprisonment, during which time Mohammed appeared. The second was the millennium of the devil's freedom, marked by a decline of Islam and a frightful growth of evil. The third, which he as the new Messiah was introducing, was the millennium of the Kingdom of God. The Mirza also prophesied that the Resurrection was near and,

discounting the doctrine of war on the infidels (*jihad*), he preached vigorously against Hindu, Christian and Shiah doctrines

In confirmation of his claims, Ghulam Ahmad drew many parallels between Jesus and himself. There was first the political parallel—the Indians under British rule were in very much the same situation as the Jews were under the Romans. Next came the moral and religious parallel—the corruptions in India during Mirza's time were in many respects like the corruptions in Palestine during the time of Christ. Thirdly, he described himself as a divinely appointed mediator between God and man, a true intercessor for man, and a perfect image of God. On the grounds of these parallels the Mirza claimed that his mission was altogether like the mission of Christ.

He asserted that he could prove by miracles the truth of his vocation as the true Messiah. However, the only things put forward as miracles were certain prophecies he had made. It is said that he predicted the death of no less than one hundred and twenty-one persons. Notably, there were some which came true, among them, for instance, the violent death of his great opponent, Pandit Lekh Ram of the Arya Samaj, and the end of Abdulla Atham, a Christian preacher. These prophecies went on for some time, but they proved so mischievous and dangerous that in 1899 the Government of the Punjab issued an order forbidding him to make further such prophecies. The Mirza meekly submitted to the order and the prophecies ceased.

He also predicted the birth of sons to certain friends, but, unfortunately, sometimes there was no birth at all, and at other times the children born were daughters, to the disgust of the parties and the discomfiture of the prophet.

In 1898 the Mirza published a pamphlet called *A Revealed Cure for the Bubonic Plague*, in which he declared a certain ointment called *marham-i-Isa* (Ointment of Jesus) to be a perfect remedy for bubonic plague, on the ground, that it had been prepared solely under the influence of 'divine inspiration'. He claimed that Christ had been revived by this ointment from the swoon into which he had fallen on the cross. The prescription for this potent remedy had been handed down, and was to be had from the medical followers of the Mirza. Unfortunately, the Govern-

ment again interfered with his divine inspiration, and prohibited the commercial exploitation of the specific.

Towards the end of his life the Mirza began to claim that he was greater than Christ. He even started to carp at the character of the historical Jesus, accusing him of drunkenness, angry vituperation, disrespect to his mother, cowardice and other shortcomings.

But his reaction to Christianity was not completely negative. His teachings were really an attempt at the reform of Muslim theology and a compromise with Western education and Christian thought. Trying to find a middle way between the extreme conservatism and bigotry of an obscurantist Muslim orthodoxy and the rationalism and pro-western trend of the Aligarh reform (inaugurated by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan), Mirza Ghulam Ahmad appealed mainly to the middle-class Muslims, who wanted a reform of only the more obvious superstitions and corruptions and favoured a slight liberalization of the old strict Islamic laws in the light of modern civilization. This provided his followers with a sufficient degree of emotional security against Christianity, and effectively blocked further conversions. Thus he succeeded in becoming the authoritarian prophet of a small but enthusiastic group that accepted his utterances as infallible dogmas.

He preached the Christian conception of the fatherhood of God as if it were a feature of Islam. He discarded Muslim intolerance by opposing the principle of *jihad* (war against the infidels), the spirit of the *ghazi* (religious fanatic), and the idea of a blood-thirsty Mahdi. He condemned tomb-worship. He felt a great uneasiness about Muslim institutions like polygamy, slavery and concubinage. He taught that the Koran was in favour of a gradual abolishment of slavery. Polygamy, the veiling of women, and divorce were, in his opinion, permitted by the Prophet only to prevent worse evils.

In his aggressive defence of Islam against Christianity and Hinduism the Mirza copied to a large extent the propaganda methods of the Christian missionaries as well as those of the Arya Samaj. He used many of the arguments against the Christian Faith and the Bible which Dayananda Saraswati had put forward in the thirteenth chapter of his *Satyarth Prakash*. Much what he wrote was of a controversial nature and not of a high theological or literary standard. He edited two papers and published

large quantities of tracts open letters challenges memorials to Government and such like propaganda He also started a high school and some charitable institutions

That Mirza Ghulam Ahmad had any success at all and found faithful and sincere disciples is proof that in some respects he was an able man though it is difficult to say much more than that He was probably sincerely convinced of his claim of being the Messiah and Mahdi but it is difficult to absolve him from an irrational mysticism if not dishonesty in his many pretensions and claims He was aggressive by nature and always eager to accept the challenge of a disputation and unscrupulous in controversy

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad died in 1908 from cholera thus effectively proving his claim of immunity from epidemics for himself and his followers to be false

It appears that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad had by his teachings and by setting up a special sect dissociated himself and his disciples from orthodox Islam This fact was early recognized by representatives of the orthodox Muslim faith They issued numerous warnings all over India against the Mirza and repeatedly refuted his doctrines and claims The strongest terms are used in his denunciation He is called a *kafir* (unbeliever) a *Dajjal* (Anti Christ) *mulhid* (heretic) *murtadd* (apostate) *kazzab* (liar) *be iman* (faithless) *dag habaz* (deceitful) etc With such epithets Muslim orthodoxy dismissed the Mirza Sahib from its fellowship and sundered all bonds with him and his followers Sir Muhammad Iqbal called for government intervention against the Ahmadiya sect and demanded its suppression

Still the sect subsequently called *Sadr Anjuman : Ahn ad ya* or Chief Society of Ahmad with its headquarters first at Qadian survived and in spite of strong opposition at the hands of the orthodox Maulvis Christian missionaries and Arya Samaj preachers like Pandit Lekh Ram began to flourish

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad found a successor in Hakim Nur ud Din an eminent Arabic scholar and physician But Nur ud Din was a quiet scholar and did not possess drive and power of leadership like the founder He died in 1914 and was succeeded by Ghulam Ahmad's son Mirza Bashir ud Din Mahmood Ahmad This able man enjoyed a long and very successful reign as head of the

sect Under his guidance the movement gained momentum in spite of bitter opposition from various quarters and inner dissensions

Under his guidance the Ahmadiyas set themselves a positive and definite programme which they were busy carrying into effect They did not meekly and passively yearn for that first golden age of Islam, under the *khulafa al rashidun*, but put themselves to hard work to reproduce it Thus they found an aim which stimulated all their energies, satisfied their needs and stirred their enthusiasm They could see the good old days being resuscitated before their eyes in Qadian

Mirza Bushir ud Din Mahmood Ahmad succeeded in creating an exceedingly strong and closely knit organization He also aroused a strong corporate enthusiasm The Ahmadiyas devoted themselves cheerfully to the service of their community, conscious that the community also was serving and supporting them They had their own schools, male literacy rose to one hundred per cent female literacy to seventy five per cent (in pardah schools) They maintained their own courts and settled disputes between members as far as possible without the interference of the government

The Ahmadiyas felt that they were taking part in a glorious creative task Qadian the headquarters of the movement once a village, became a thriving town enjoying a minor capitalist boom The members of the movement cheerfully paid the heavy taxes imposed on them, landowners and others with private incomes, and retired professional men moved to Qadian to live other enterprising members came there to set up businesses which prospered The movement itself owned and operated factories and industries in Qadian and encouraged wealthy members to do likewise The result was that many labourers were attracted to Qadian No member who wanted work remained unemployed while for those who could not be employed a poor house was opened

When Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was still alive he had ordained that the members of his sect should attend regular weekly services and hold annual conferences This custom was continued even after his death Qadian became the centre where every year during Christmas week the Ahmadiyas gathered together from different countries to pay homage to the founder of their movement and to deliberate on their common problems

Inevitably, inner dissensions broke out in the Ahmadiya movement. The first branch that broke loose from Qadian was started at Sorapur in the Deccan. A man named Abdullah was the leader there for many years. He became so powerful that he declared himself a prophet, with the result that the Ahmadiya sect at Sorapur split into two sections, one loyal to the original founder and his successor, and the other following Abdullah. Finally the section loyal to Ghulam Ahmad prevailed though for some time feelings ran high.

A more serious and lasting schism broke out in 1914 after the death of Nur-ud Din. A group headed by Khwajah Kamal ud-Din, a former pleader at the Chief Court of Lahore, seceded and formed the so-called Lahore Group. The quarrel started over the claim of the founder to be called a prophet. The Qadian party, headed by Ghulam Ahmad's son, regarded him as a prophet (*nabi*), while the Lahore party insisted that he was only a reformer. The members of the Lahore party were more liberal minded, and resented the mystic authoritarianism of Ghulam Ahmad and his son and successor. They had different views on the movement's policy, while the Qadianis always insisted on stressing the points of difference between their tenets and those of other Muslims. The Lahore party was from the first more conciliatory and tended to merge in thought and practice with the orthodox Muslim community.

Both sections have been actively engaged in overseas missions since their early days. In fact, the Ahmadiya movement is important not so much on account of the large number of its adherents, but for its very active propaganda in both the spoken and written word. It thus represents a revival of the missionary spirit of Islam in India. The Ahmadiya missionaries are the heart and core of the whole sect. Many of them belong to the so called *Dervishes*, a select group of members who have dedicated their lives to the service of their community and of Islam. As early as 1913 the sect sent its first missionaries to England, later some went to Germany and other European countries to America, East Asia, Africa etc. Missionary propaganda is particularly active through the press. Both sections of the Ahmadiya movement publish numerous periodicals and books in which the claim of Ghulam Ahmad to be the promised prophet or Messiah is

vigorously supported and Christianity vehemently attacked. Thus Maulvi Mohammed Ali for many years president of the Lahore section after Khwajah Kamal ud Din was the author of a translation of the Koran into English and numerous other books and pamphlets on Islam. His writings lacked depth and objectivity. He was a bitter antagonist of Christianity which he never tired of attacking. He died in 1902 at Karachi.

The partition of India has hit the Ahmadiya Movement hard. The spiritual head of the Qadianis Mirza Bashir ud Din left for Pakistan with over ten thousand of his followers. At first he settled at Lahore but moved later to Rabwah near Jhang in West Pakistan a hilly and undeveloped area. There he attempted to build up a new Qadian. From here their world wide mission now receives its directives. Here their extensive literature is published and here the missionaries are trained.

Qadian so long the economic and spiritual centre of the Ahmadiya movement was looted and sacked during the great national upheaval that followed the Partition in 1947, but in spite of riots and danger to their lives over three hundred members of the sect remained at Qadian headquarters now reduced to a small part of the town. Early in 1948 they were completely boycotted for twenty six days at the instigation of Hindu and Sikh refugees in the town. Their sufferings were great but they persevered and eventually the boycott was lifted. Throughout the days of persecution the Ahmadiyas continued to help others making no distinction of creed or caste. This softened the opposition to the Ahmadiya sect in India.

The fate of the Ahmadiyas in Pakistan was not at all a happy one either. This was due to a number of causes — religious, political and economic. For one thing the orthodox Maulvis have never accepted the Ahmadiya sect as part of Islam. Then the movement was disliked for its social exclusiveness: its members refused to pray in a non Ahmadiya mosque, to attend a non Ahmadiya funeral, to take part in non Ahmadiya political aspirations. They deliberately cut themselves off from the general Muslim community and its problems. It was this social aloofness rather than the theology that has occasioned the bitter antagonism between the Muslims and the Qadianis at least though the Lahore party fared a little better. The average Muslim was jealous of

the Ahmadiyahs on account of their economic prosperity and political influence which was quite disproportionate to their numbers. One of the foremost political leaders of Pakistan Muhammad Zafrullah Khan for some time Foreign Minister of Pakistan was a member of the sect. In 1952 the Maulvis demanded his resignation and the removal of a number of other highly placed Qadiani government servants. When the Pakistani Government did not comply with the demands of the Ulama's in 1953 serious rioting broke out. The agitation was suppressed but the orthodox Muslims still detest the Ahmadiyahs as heretics or even non Muslims. Cases of persecution are occasionally reported in the press.

The Ahmadiyahs have displayed a remarkable spirit of initiative and enterprise. Economically they are quite prosperous ninety five per cent of them are literate. In business and industry they have done really well. Some of them hold high civil and military offices. During the last World War about seven thousand Ahmadiyahs served as volunteers in the army.

Today the adherents of the Ahmadiyah sect numbering well over a million are scattered practically all over the globe and belong to various races and nations.

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MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS IN WESTERN INDIA

In the nineteenth century — the time of most of the messianic movements of western India described in this chapter — western India was scarcely ever at peace. It was ravaged by a general unrest of a political, economic, social and religious nature.

Politically, there had always been a great deal of fighting in western India. Exposed to frequent invasions by land and sea, western India was divided into many small principalities which were continually fighting each other in their struggles for supremacy. With the arrival of the British the wars between the Gujarat states ceased, but the mutual jealousy and hatred were still too strong to unite them against the common foe. Thus the British were able to subdue and annex one state after another, with comparatively little expenditure of troops and money, though it took them many years to complete the conquest of Gujarat. Even when the annexation was accomplished, the fighting was not over, for revolts started now and again. As soon as the country was finally pacified a different type of independence struggle started, which was brought to a successful end only in 1947, though not without much fighting and bloodshed.

Economically, the lower castes and classes were much exploited and overtaxed by princes and landlords and subjected to many ignominies. Occasionally, when oppression became too severe the oppressed classes became rebellious, but in course of time economic conditions improved a little until another war plunged the people again into economic distress. This happened all too often.

With the arrival of the British the economy of western India was again seriously upset. The British colonial officers introduced a new type of land settlement, a new revenue and judiciary administration which in their very efficiency and order disturbed the precarious economic balance of the country. It brought severe hardship in its wake not only for the cultivators but for landlords, administrative officials, soldiers and rulers too. Socially and religiously western India was restless, because under British rule a new class of westernized people with a different mental

outlook and a different set of values was growing up. While Christian conversion work was never a serious threat to Hindu and Muslim faiths in western India, Christian ideas invaded more generally the whole population and made social and religious reforms necessary in the eyes of 'enlightened' Hindus and Muslims. The old orthodoxy became uncertain and lost its traditional hold on the people.

This insecurity did not affect all classes of the population alike nor for the same reasons. Thus messianic movements resulting from mental insecurity and economic and political disturbance arose in western India among various strata of the population and were started for quite diverse motives and causes.

I AMONG THE LOW CASTES OF GUJARAT

Around the year A.D. 1800 the Indian caste system was as severe and rigid in Gujarat as in other parts of India. Especially hard was the lot of the untouchables. Their fate was to some extent shared by the so-called *Adivasis* (aborigines) though these could escape the greatest indignities from the discriminating high Hindu castes by retreating into the forests. In the villages and towns of Gujarat the low castes were deprived of all social, religious and civic rights. The more fortunate ones among them tilled the land as tenants or worked as labourers in the fields, while a great number of them subsisted on food or grain given to them as village servants. Others plied trades of a low and degrading order as shoe makers, street sweepers and scavengers. Some skinned carcasses, tanned hides and skins or worked in bamboo and cane or were weavers of coarse cloth.

Generally they lived in inadequate accommodation, insanitary surroundings and a state of social segregation. They were born in debt and lived and died in it. They were denied the use of public wells and other public amenities, their children were not admitted to schools attended by caste Hindu children, and though they venerated the gods of the Hindus and observed the same festivals, the Hindu temples were closed to them. Barbers and washermen refused to render them service. They could not enter hotels and tea shops. In many ways the low castes were treated by the high Hindu castes as sub-human, less than men, worse than beasts.

The more spirited among the low castes, particularly the Kolis, occasionally broke out in rebellion against this inhuman treatment. They committed depredations of all kinds and burned and plundered villages. But badly organized and poorly armed, they could always be subdued by military force. Hunger and exposure forced them into submission as surely as defeat in battle.

Against this dark background must be seen the religious movement of Sahajanand Swami, who devoted his life work to the spiritual and moral reform of the Kolis and other low castes and depressed classes of Gujarat. His memory is blessed in the Koli villages throughout the State of Gujarat.

Sahajanand Swami was born in A.D. 1780 in a Brahmin family at Chhapaiya near Ajudhia in Uttar Pradesh. At an early age the boy lost his parents, showing early a religious disposition, he became a religious mendicant and wandered all over India visiting the principal shrines of Hinduism. As a boy of eleven he is said to have committed to memory the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Vishnu Sahasra Nama*. During his rambles, he visited Gujarat several times and finally settled permanently in this State.

When he was twenty years old, he had himself initiated into the Ramanandi order of the Vaishnava sect, and soon acquired such a reputation for holiness and zeal that the founder and head of the order, Ramananda, himself nominated him as his successor. The young *sadhu* Sahajanand or Swami Narayan, as he was later called, had some trouble in maintaining his position but he succeeded in keeping most of the members of the sect under his jurisdiction.

Sahajanand, though originally a Vaishnava developed in course of time a theology of his own. This prompted his followers to give his sect a new name. It was called Satsang—Godly Fellowship. By his preaching and his own exemplary life Sahajanand succeeded in winning many converts, especially among the lower castes. However, Brahmins and members of the higher castes joined him too.

He proclaimed the worship of one personal deity, whom he called 'Narayana' or 'Krishna'. Swami Narayan told Bishop Heber who visited him that he called God by the name of 'Krishna'. He believed that Krishna had come down on earth

in ancient times had been put to death by wicked men through magic and that since his time many false revelations had been put forward, and many false divinities set up. He said that Krishna is other name of Surya the Sun god.

If Bishop Heber has understood him correctly, Swami Narayan had considerably swerved from the Vaishnava faith which holds that Krishna belongs to the lunar race and therefore can never be identified with the Sun (Surya) and that he was not killed but simply vanished in Vishnu.

Swami Narayan was not averse to giving out that he himself was a fresh incarnation of Vishnu. It is said that he displayed miraculous powers before his disciples entrancing those he cast eyes upon and causing them in this mesmeric state — which he called *samadhi* or ecstasy — to imagine that they saw Sahajanand as Krishna in yellow robes with the weapons of war and the other emblems of the god and to behold him seated as chief and centre in an assembly of divine beings. In later years Swami Narayan pretended as his very name 'Swami Narayan' suggests to be the Supreme Being himself with Krishna and Rama serving him as his attendants.

Sahajanand preached that Krishna would bring salvation. By identifying himself with Krishna or as a new incarnation of him or of Vishnu himself who according to Hindu beliefs incarnates himself in various forms when *dharma* (religion) is declining Swami Narayan assumed consciously and explicitly the role of a Messiah and bringer of salvation.

In a poetical work *Yama Danda* said to have been inspired by Sahajanand and written by his disciple Lalji Sahajanand is spoken of as the Incarnate God. He is Sri Krishna the greatest of Incarnations and whosoever comes to him with faith and trust is saved from Judgment and gains salvation. This is not all. Sahajanand is said to come to his followers at the time of their leaving the body alone or accompanied by some of his *sadhus* to take them with him to his heavenly abode. He comes with his horse or in his chariot and is sometimes seen thus by other people. He sometimes comes to them a few days before they pass away, tells them he will take them on a particular day and fulfils his promise. The author declares with remarkable assurance that his master is the Saviour. The last chapter is a beautiful

song of thanksgiving and joy for the great salvation that he has received

His followers maintain that Swami Narayan proved his divine and messianic character beyond doubt by performing many miracles. It is recorded that he healed the sick, restored life to the dead, was seen by large crowds in two different places at the same time, provided miraculously a large amount of clarified butter (*ghee*) for a sacrifice, saved his disciples repeatedly in shipwreck or from robbers, made it rain, and wrought a great number of other miracles. He had also the gift of prophecy and foretold among other things the rise of an alien power in India.

A story is told of him which serves well to illustrate his divine omniscience and godly generosity in the eyes of his followers. In his time there lived in Gujarat a famous robber Joban by name. He is still well remembered in Gujarat folklore as the Indian version of Robin Hood. Once he came by night to steal a splendid Kathuwaru mare belonging to the Swami. Though it was pitch-dark the Swami saw the thief and called out to him: 'Joban, if you need a horse, take mine!' This combination of omniscience and generosity won him the heart and admiration of his people. Joban became the Swami's faithful disciple.

In spite of his unquestionably high ethical principles Swami Narayan must have been something of an impostor. He obviously knew how to hypnotize people, which was so much easier for him because his subjects were from the first moment of their meeting him, captivated by his appearance and believed him to be a superior human being, even before he had a seance with them. Swami Narayan, though most probably ignorant of the exact nature of his ability to hypnotize, must have known that what his mesmerized subjects saw was hallucination and not reality. Still he allowed them to labour under this error of judgement because it served his purpose well.

The Swami was a revolutionary too. Though a Brahmin by birth and upbringing, he concentrated his religious and social activities principally on the Kolis, Kathus and Dhers, who were outcasts and despised serfs and menials of the higher Hindu castes. In his time it required considerable courage in a Brahmin to go against the caste prejudices of his contemporaries and face ostracism. It required also a rare broadmindedness and a true

religious spirit to care for these people who by tradition and general opinion were considered outside the Hindu fold and unworthy of sharing the higher ideals of Hinduism. However Swami Narayan had disciples from among the respectable Hindu castes even Brahmins joined him. He taught them to regard each other high and low, as brothers.

The Swami further set himself up against the depraved monasticism of various Hindu sects—especially the Vallabhacharis—which in Gujarat enjoyed the favour of kings and wealthy patrons and consequently came to relax its original zeal for asceticism. Many inmates of the immensely rich monasteries (*maths*) enjoyed a luxurious and even immoral life forgetting their vows of celibacy and non attachment to earthly goods. The Swami boldly denounced these irregularities of the Maharaj and Vallabhacharya orders which had even been introduced into their liturgies of worship and severely censured the vices for which their members had become notorious.

Swami Narayan was not afraid of embarrassing ruling chiefs of Saurashtra by criticizing their excesses in drinking and gambling. It is said that he induced some to give up wine and gambling. He also upbraided them for performing animal sacrifices and he used all his influence to abolish female infanticide (common in those days among Rajputs and Kathis) and widow burning (*sati*).

In 1826 Swami Narayan summarized his ethical teachings in a book entitled *Shikshapatrika* or Code of Discipline written in Gujarati and later translated into Sanskrit. It is one of the best spiritual and ethical codes of the nineteenth century in Hinduism and remains an inspiring handbook of conduct in Gujarat and Saurashtra.

His creed prohibited the destruction of an animal life, the use of animal food and of intoxicating liquors and drugs on any occasion, suicide, theft and robbery, calumnies, false accusations and lying. The Swami had a special love of chastity and purity of soul. In his youth he is said to have got a fit of vomiting if the mere shadow of a woman approached him. He gave strict rules to his disciples for dealing with the opposite sex. Prevarication and adultery were unforgivable sins.

He founded a religious order of women who were well instructed in the tenets of his sect and could then transmit their knowledge

to the wives and daughters of his followers. The women had their own rooms for prayer and instruction in the temples of the Satsang. He did not want the women to be instructed by his disciples; it would lead to temptation and sin.

Swami Narayan created a special order of *sadhus* who had to renounce the world and follow him in a special manner. From this order of Paramhansas or Great Souls as he called them, the Swami exacted five great vows by which they would be enabled to attain the highest principles and ideals of Bhagavata Dharma or Divine Religion. These vows were (1) the vow of Non desire (2) the vow of Non lust (3) the vow of Non taste (4) the vow of Non covetousness and (5) the vow of Non pride. In a circular letter he explained these vows in great detail to his disciples from whom he demanded extreme non attachment to earthly goods, strict celibacy, abandonment of caste and absolute obedience. He was indeed able to inspire these high ideals of an ascetic life into a great number of disciples. When he died over five hundred *sadhus* had been initiated.

He also engaged his *sadhus* in manual work — another of his revolutionary innovations. He ordered them to dig wells and new tanks or to repair old ones that had gone out of use. He had his disciples build a number of big temples and many small ones at various places. He opened kitchens and fed the hungry in times of famine.

While Swami Narayan's ethical demands were severe and highly exacting for his closer followers, his moral teaching was practical and moderate as far as the low castes and aboriginal tribes of Gujarat were concerned. Indeed they had a very good effect on them. The villages and districts which had received him and accepted his teachings soon became the best and most orderly in the province of Bombay. This is the judgement of Bishop Heber who in those times made a journey through Gujarat and wrote a famous report about his travels through the whole of Upper India.

As Swami Narayan seems to have possessed a great attraction for the lower classes such as the Kolis, Kathis and Bhils, he became their spiritual model and ideal. They regarded him as the refuge of sinners. He assumed for them a position resembling that of the Founder of Christianity. They went to him when they

were tortured by a bad conscience and he forgave them their sins, for was he not their god? And they could also obtain forgiveness of sins by serving him and his disciples

In some other respects too Swami Narayan had a certain similarity to Christ. In his sect a rite is used which distantly resembles the Christian Communion. It was called the 'Rite of the Cup', all members of the sect in spite of their belonging to different castes drank from the same cup. This rite was followed by the distribution of sacred food which they took in common regardless of caste.

These often revolutionary innovations, together with the keen criticism of old customs and indulgences, earned him the hostility of the Peshwa and Maratha Brahmins. For a long time the Swami and his disciples were subjected to persecution and harassment. The Peshwa governor of Gujarat expelled the Satsangis from the domains of the Peshwas, and many important landowners and merchants refused to receive them. The *sadhus* were often refused alms and had to starve, they were beaten and subjected to many indignities. Swami Narayan had taught his followers the Christian doctrine of suffering injury without retaliation, and the devotees of hostile sects sometimes took advantage of this to beat them mercilessly, some were even put to death.

In order to protect the Swami, his followers finally decided to surround him with a guard. This body guard gradually grew into a small army. It was raised from among his followers and consisted of some two hundred horsemen mostly well armed with matchlocks and swords, and several of them with coats of mail and spears. Besides these Swami Narayan had a large number of men with bows and arrows. These guards of Swami Narayan were, in the words of Bishop Heber volunteers consisting of his disciples and enthusiastic admirers men who had voluntarily repaired to hear his lesson, who now took pride in doing him honour, and would cheerfully fight to the last drop of blood rather than suffer a fringe of his garment to be handled roughly.

Bishop Heber describes Swami Narayan as a middle-sized, thin plain looking person, with a mild diffident expression and nothing about him indicative of extraordinary talent.

Swami Narayan accepted as his due the royal pomp with which

he was surrounded. He wore a coat and a turban of gold brocade rode horses and, when on a visit to the British Resident rode on an elephant with all the insignia of royalty. He held a court of his own. Scholars, poets and chiefs accompanied him on his journeys. But he was austere in his personal life. Among his followers he enforced equality and simplicity. His great attraction lay in his capacity for inspiring high moral conduct among his followers.

Though his large body-guard could easily have aroused the suspicion and anxiety of the British Government this was not so. Owing apparently, to the high moral character of his preaching and his success in reducing to order and tranquillity the turbulent Kolis and Bhils who accepted his doctrines Swami Narayan enjoyed the full confidence and a large measure of respect of the officers of the colonial government.

There was, however, another organization created by the Swami, which had in it an element of danger. It was the custom of Swami Narayan to invite large numbers of people for the celebration of imposing sacrifices (*yagnas*). These were meant to counteract the very popular rites of the Vama Marga or left-handed Shakti Panth which had its centre at Ahmedabad and which sanctioned meat-eating, wine-drinking and sexual license, moreover, it gave them a sort of sacramental character, so that to do these things was considered a meritorious act. Swami Narayan not only protested against these impure and depraved practices, but tried to replace them by a series of impressive sacrificial celebrations according to his own ritual.

These sacrifices lasted days and even weeks during which tens of thousands of people came from far and wide to witness them as if they were on a sort of pilgrimage. Hundreds of learned but poor Brahmins and others were fed for days together. In those days when there were no newspapers or printing presses such gatherings were the only means of giving wide publicity to movements of the Swami's kind. The Yagnas themselves, because of their bloodless character, were a part of the propaganda of the new faith. However, these feasts were too exciting in their character, and the gatherings of people who came to witness them were too large and unruly to keep under control. There was always the danger that the religious enthusiasm which animated

them might turn into an uncontrollable frenzy and excite mass hysteria. Unscrupulous elements could make use of the passions of the masses and pervert them into movements of a political or revolutionary character.

Accordingly after some years the Swami gave up the idea of celebrating these sacrificial feasts and replaced them by smaller and better organized meetings of the members of his Satsang. Every year two meetings of his sect were held at Vartal and Gadhada. These conventions (Samayas) are still held annually by the members of the Satsang.

In 1826 Swami Narayan made his testament. He divided the whole of Gujarat into two parts: the northern with headquarters at Ahmedabad and the southern with its centre at Vartal in the Kaira District. Two of his nephews were installed as heads of the two sections with power to initiate Satsangis in general and *sadhus* in particular. This organization was necessary as the sect had grown numerous and now possessed great wealth. The Swami had attracted large donations with which he founded temples in many important places, particularly in Gujarat and Saurashtra and in other regions of India too.

Swami Narayan died in 1830 at Gadhada in Kathiawar. He was practically deified by his disciples. In Gujarat they erected resthouses (*chauras*) and monuments to his memory in all the villages and beneath all the trees where he had at any time stayed. Each follower of the sect is supposed to worship daily the image and the footprints (*padukas*) of Sahajanand Swami on a piece of cloth. In almost every important village there is a Swaminarayan temple which is attended in the morning or in the evening or at both times by all the followers. There are separate passages in the temples for women and separate reading and preaching halls for them. Each member of the sect is supposed to present to his Acharya one twentieth of his income while the more devout pay one tenth.

Soon after the Swami's death his eloquent discourses were collected by his disciples into *Iacharamrita* or the Nectar of Speech. This book along with the *Shiksha Patrika* became one of the subsidiary scriptures of the sect and is often read during daily prayers.

In later times the sect was divided by deep doctrinal and

administrative dissensions which finally led to a break-up of the followers of Swami Narayan into two separate sects

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2. AMONG THE NAIKDas

The Naikdas are a very wild forest tribe of Panch Mahals and Rewa Kantha in Gujarat State. They number less than ten thousand individuals. In the early decades of the nineteenth century they had the reputation of exceeding the Bhils in predatory and lawless habits, in their cruelty, bloodthirstiness, and love of independence. 'May the Naikdas seize you' is still a common imprecation among bullock-drivers. Their chiefs used to organize forays, and were inveterate cattle lifters. When the British took over the administration of the region they had much trouble in pacifying them.

In October 1858, they again rose in insurrection, instigated by the intrigues of a brother in law of the then Gaekwar of Baroda who was in sympathy with the rebels of the Mutiny. Under the leadership of Rupa Naik (*alias* Rupsingh) and Keval Naik, the Naikdas put up a stiff fight and though never actually defeated, were persuaded by a British officer to submit. In March 1859 they accepted amnesty.

In 1867 a Naikda of the village Vadek, about one and a half miles north west of Jambughodā, Joria by name, began to act as an inspired man, giving out that he was God (Parameshwar) and preaching the purest Hindu morality. He claimed to have the power of working miracles and succeeded in making a number of converts among his tribal fellows. Nothing is known about his youth, but Joria must have had long and close contact with Hindu religious men, for he showed a surprising knowledge of Hindu mythology and ritual.

So great was his success that to be allowed to approach him was thought a high favour, and numbers of worshippers some of them men of good caste and position followed him from place to place seeking his blessing. Joria held spiritual court himself supreme and under him there were many grades of attendants who were believed to be possessed by lower deities. So elaborate was his scheme that it seemed to have been thought out by a Brahmin or *sanyasi* (monk) but this could never be proved. It appears that the whole elaborate organization was the sole work of Bhagat Joria himself.

About the middle of January 1868 Joria gained a most useful disciple in Rupsingh Gobar a former rebel leader who had accepted amnesty in 1858. Rupsingh though a Naikda and uneducated was a man of great natural ability shrewdness and tact and possessed great power over the people of his tribe. He was proprietor of a village Dandiapur. Rupsingh pretended to be an enthusiastic disciple of Joria and even gave up his daughters to play the part of *Gopis* (milkmaids) the legendary sweethearts of god Krishna. In this manner he gained influence over Joria Bhagat who subsequently agreed to abandon his scheme of moral reform and to join Rupsingh in establishing a kingdom of which Joria should be the spiritual and Rupsingh the temporal head.

Joria's birthplace the village of Vadek was chosen as the royal seat. A joint court was established and revenue collected partly from religious gifts, partly from the levy of transit dues.

Of these doings and of the accompanying local excitement the native officials took no notice and sent no word to the Governor's Agent then in a distant part of the district. Before long the new rulers took steps to advance their power more openly.

At the end of January Rupsingh revived an old claim to a share in the revenue of Rajgad a police station near Narukot. His claim was rejected. A few days later having collected a body of Naikdas and taking Joria Bhagat with him Rupsingh came to Rajgad. Leaving Joria and the Naikdas outside the bamboo palisade Rupsingh and his sons went into the station invited the Makrani garrison to go and see the holy personage and seated himself beside the commandant and other officers of the post. After a time the talk turned to Joria's spiritual power and pretensions. One of the officers holding out his closed hand asked

in jest if the divinity could tell what was in his hand. "There is death in it," shouted Galah Rupsingh's eldest son and drawing his sword he cut the man down. The commandant escaped through a window and the Marathi guard outside the stockade and unarmed, fled. The Naikdas swarmed in, broke open the treasure chest and ransacked the place.

Rupsingh lost no time in following up his success. Jambhughoda about fourteen miles distant from Rajgad though not fortified was the chief post in the neighbourhood with a guard of about thirty armed police. To the commandant of this post Rupsingh sent word. Get ready to fight. Rupsingh is on the way.

On 1 February, in the afternoon, seeing bands of Naikdas coming towards the station the Jambhughoda commandant drew up his men opposite an opening in the fence. From the advancing crowd three Bhagat consecrated champions their bare bodies smeared with red paint came forward shot arrows and grasping their swords rushed at the stockade. As they came on the guard fired a volley their bullets they said dashed the paint off the champions' bodies but did them no harm. By this time the champions were within the enclosure and the panic-stricken police leaving two of their number dead took to flight.

The station was pillaged the records torn the shops and houses sacked. After this the village of Jetpur, at the time the residence of the Chhota Udapur chief was taken the chief flying for his life. Though successful this attack on Jetpur did much to shake his followers' trust in Joria Bhagat two of his wound-proof warriors were shot dead. The Bhagat said they were not really dead and sent the bodies to Vadek declaring that if the British troops came up against them they would rise and fight. After a day or two at Vadek the house where the bodies lay was burnt and in spite of his explanation that the men had died because they had disobeyed his orders the trust in Joria's power was shaken.

Hearing that the old outlaw Rupsingh was out and had sacked Rajgad the British authorities sent to Baroda and Ahmedabad for military aid. The officers started with twenty-five troops of the Bhil Corps by cross-country tracks straight for Jambhughoda. On the way they were met by news of the capture of Jambhughoda. Their escort of Bhil troops was too small and they waited at

Halol twenty five miles west of Jambughoda for the arrival of additional troops. After some days the troops from Baroda and Ahmedabad arrived and pressed on to Shivrajpur about eleven miles east of Jambughoda.

During these days the Naikdas at Vadek were full of the wildest trust and zeal. Almost every soul for about twenty four miles round believed that the British Government was at an end and that under Rupsingh and Joria a religious rule (*dharmraj*) had begun. In their previous fights with trained troops the Naikdas had carefully avoided the open. By sudden night attacks they had wearied their opponents. As they seemed now to have given up their old tactics every effort was made to lose no time in letting them try their luck in open fight.

Leaving only seventy five troops at Shivrajpur the main portion of the British troops advanced towards Jambughoda. When the Naikdas at Vadek heard that the greater portion of the troops had left Shivrajpur they decided to attack the garrison left there but the news of the attack leaked out and the garrison put up a cart barricade. At dusk with shouts of Ram Ram the Naikdas poured out of the forest led by one of their wound proof warriors shooting arrows and firing matchlocks they charged the camp. Met by a steady fire they retired with losses and after two more fruitless efforts carrying their dead with them they withdrew before dawn to Vadek. Of the garrison seven soldiers were wounded but the Naikdas had twenty eight killed or wounded.

Early the same morning (Sunday 16 February) starting from Jambughoda the British troops marched against Vadek. On the approach to the village small parties of Naikdas were seen scattered over the hill sides and on the level ground. As the troops came closer one man in bright yellow and red was conspicuous moving about with a band of followers some were dancing in religious frenzy others were armed with bows and arrows. At first unconcerned the leader and his band suddenly made for the hill. To cut off their retreat the cavalry led by Captain Macleod dashed forward. Two attempts to strike the man in red and yellow failed and the troopers all except the police inspector and a native officer of the Poona Horse believing that the Naikda leader had a charmed life fell back. Against the two unaided horsemen the Naikdas plied their arrows with such

effect that the Risaldar of the Poona Horse was killed. Twice Captain Macleod narrowly escaped. Emboldened by this success the Naikdas although the infantry was close upon them kept advancing till as their foremost men reached the bank of a water course a shot from each of the three district officers laid low the leader in red and yellow and two of his chief supporters. With the loss of nine of their number the Naikdas fled and the rising was at an end.

The slain leader was at first thought to be Joria but Joria had escaped, this was merely a deputy whom Joria had decked out in his own clothes in token of his trust. Rupsingh's second son was among the killed and Rupsingh himself though he escaped was wounded.

Order was soon restored. On the assurance that their misconduct would be forgiven the people came in and settled in their villages. The four chief criminals Joria Bhagat, Rupsingh, his eldest son Galaha and his minister were still at large but by unceasing pursuit all were secured in less than a month. After trial they were convicted and hanged along with one of Joria's spiritual champions who had taken an active part in the sack of Jambughoda. A force of over a thousand men had to be engaged to quell the insurrection of Bhagat Joria. Two sons of Bhagat Joria later enlisted in the Gujarat Bhil Corps (in 1870) and proved themselves loyal soldiers.

LITERATURE J. M. Campbell *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency Kaira and Panch Mahals* vol. 3 Bombay 1879 pp. 223, 225, 225-28.

3. AMONG THE SURAT DUBLAS

A very peculiar type of messianic movement took place in 1877 in the Panch Mahals which affected over a thousand Talavias or Surat Dublas as they were also called.

At the time of transfer in 1853 the district of Panch Mahals was greatly underpopulated. The Government had consequently made strenuous efforts to draw settlers from the crowded parts of Central Gujarat to the Panch Mahals. These efforts were to a certain extent successful as the later census reports show. But up to 1877 all attempts to colonize on a large scale failed.

In that year a movement took place among some of the lower class cultivators of Central Gujarat. It is of special interest not

only because it was spontaneous and widespread, but because in spite of very great difficulty in the nature of the settlers and of their first seasons in the Panch Mahals, it had to some extent proved a success

In March 1877 the Halol police reported that over a thousand Talavias (a low class tribe of Central Gujarat apparently the same as the Surat Dublas) were encamped close to Mount Pavagad. They had with them their wives, children, cattle and some store of grain, and said they had come to settle. After the first detachment hundreds of families kept pouring in each with a cart or rough bullock sledge piled high with grindstones, bunches of fowls, clothes, cooking pots and children. Behind came the father of the family loaded with burdens and then the mother and the elder children also carrying burdens and driving before them their small stocks of goats and cows.

Their answers were always the same. 'Who are you?' 'Talavias', answered they. 'Where are you going?' 'To Mata'. 'What for?' 'To cultivate'. 'Where have you come from?' 'From there', they answered with a long drawl and a backward wave of the hand. 'Why did you leave?' 'There was no land, the people with money turned us out of our fields.'

A few more questions, and they would give the name of the district and village they came from, ending with the refrain 'Many more of us are on the way'. On reaching Pavagad the first act of each family was to worship at the hilltop shrine of the *mata* (mother goddess). For days, in an almost unbroken stream, the worshippers kept passing up and down returning with their brows smeared with the red mark of the goddess.

Camps were formed each with its headman or *patel* the people from the different districts choosing to camp by themselves. When their camp was fixed each family raised a rough hut and cattle shed and buried their supplies of grain in the ground. Some of the old wells, relics of Champaner's former greatness, were cleared out and yielded good water.

This movement was due to a religious teacher or *guru* who had been ordered by the goddess Kalka Mata and a Musalman saint to tell the people that if they went back to their old Champaner home they would find riches and plenty, if they refused to go they would die. As a token of her favour the Mata promised on

the night of the full moon in March to set fire to their offering of butter and rice and to send a Brahmin to tell them what they should do

On the 22nd the night of the full moon seven thousand of the Talvans went up the hill each carrying something to swell the general offering. All was made ready and duly laid before the Mother, the worshippers waited watching till dawn to see their offerings catch fire. No fire started, no Brahmin, no voice from the goddess. At last tired out with waiting they set fire to their offering and left convinced that the work had not had the Mother's favour.

Most of them went back to their old homes. Of the 1867 families only 685 with 10 carts, 57 ploughs, 133 bullocks and about 250 cows and goats remained. They settled close to Pivagad except a few who chose sites a couple of miles away, forming twelve hamlets with houses built in square groups, not each by itself like those of the Panch Mahals, Bhils and Naikdas. During the hot weather they earned a living chiefly by selling firewood in the nearby villages and received some government aid in the shape of road making and pond clearing. With this and the help of money advances they were able before the rainy season to finish their houses, to buy about nine hundred head of cattle and to sow 798 acres of land.

But the failure of the rains between June and October 1877 pressed them hard. Many went back to their old homes. The rest, without skill or habits of steady work, seem by degrees to have fallen back to their former position of labourers. In founding a colony the movement had not been a great success, but it was not without some good results. An area of 675 acres had been cleared for cultivation and taken over by Kunbis, Nohras and other high class peasants whose skilled and prudent labour soon turned the abandoned fields into fertile lands.

LITERATURE J. M. Campbell *Cazetier of the Bombay Presidency Ka a and Panch Mahals* vol 3 Bombay 1879 pp 227-29

4 A MARATHIA BRAHMIN MESSIAH

The life and deeds of Vasudeo Balvant Phadke form a romantic and tragic chapter in the history of messianic movements in India. It becomes all the more interesting as the details of his life story

are accurately known from his own diary and the autobiography which he wrote during an interval in his campaigns.

Born in 1815 at Shirdhon in the District of Kolaba near Bombay in a wealthy Chitpavan Brahmin family Vasudeo Balvant Phadke probably inherited his impetuous self-confident and restless nature from his grandfather Anantrao who had been in charge of a fort at Karnala near Shirdhon till he had to surrender it after a desperate but hopeless struggle to the superior might of the British in 1818. Vasudeo did not receive much schooling in early youth but made up for it later when he even attended classes in an English school in addition to his classes in the Kalvan Marathi school. He studied further in Bombay and Poona but without appearing for the School Final Examination.

Vasudeo loved physical exercise. He trained his body through strenuous gymnastics. He learned fencing, horse-riding and target-firing. Thus he grew into a tall, strong youth with massive shoulders and a broad chest. His physical appearance alone commanded respect.

His knowledge of English enabled him to secure, after some years of employment in private firms, a job in government service while still in his teens. It was in 1863 that he joined the Commissariat (Military Accounts) department and continued to serve in it for over fifteen years.

Extremely sensitive and impulsive by nature, Vasudeo developed during the years of his service a strong patriotic feeling and joined an organization for the promotion of the national uplift of India (Aikyavardhini). With other like-minded young men he shared a profound dislike for the British rulers of India. He blamed them for the loss of the traditional high position which the Chitpavan Brahmins had occupied in the past in Maharashtra. He emphasized the fact that the Peshwas, whom the British had deposed, were also members of his community.

This dislike of the British deepened into hatred through an incident in his office. In 1869 he was informed of the serious illness of his mother, whom he loved very much, and applied for leave, but there was a delay on the part of his superiors in granting him leave, with the result that when Vasudeo rushed at last to his mother's bedside she had already expired.

But his grudge against the British was not merely a personal one Vasudeo's feelings were deeply stirred by the devastation caused in Western India by the terrible famine of 1876-77 in which the local population suffered extremely He was firmly convinced that the miseries of India were the consequences of foreign rule He was confirmed in this conviction by a lecture delivered in 1872 by M G Ranade which had impressed itself indelibly on his memory Its subject had been the shocking exploitation of Indian wealth by the British colonizers This Bombay famine was for Vasudeo the glaring proof for Ranade's allegations

Slowly he came to the conviction that all the evils in India famine, disease and immorality, were the results of British domination Freedom from the British yoke would bring by itself deliverance from all evils in India and restore the Indian nation to its pristine greatness, happiness and goodness It was for this aim and end that Vasudeo was ready to devote finally all his talent and energy, and even risk his life in the service for his country He wanted to follow in the footsteps of Shivaji the great Maratha leader It was his tragedy that the conditions in the country had changed and the methods of Shivaji could not lead to success any more

During this time Vasudeo also became intensely religious He showed a strong veneration to his tutelary deity Sri Datta¹ and he would not take his meal before first worshipping the deity He even composed a book in praise of Sri Datta to spread devotion towards the deity

Vasudeo, however, was not content with lofty patriotic sentiments He intended to promote actively the final deliverance of his countrymen from the foreign yoke He therefore began to give speeches and lectures to the people in which he denounced the British rulers and exhorted his audience to join the freedom movement His strong voice great fervour and obvious sincerity made his speeches convincing His diction was simple his arguments straight and to the point But the response was poor

Later in his autobiography he disclosed how he gave lectures

¹ Obviously Dattatreya the three gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva united in one person.

in Poona and other places with the intention of 'poisoning the minds of the people against the British' His mind dwelled constantly on his own grievances against the foreigners, and on the grievances of his fellow Indians He confessed 'Thinking of thousands of things like this, my mind turned against the English, and I wished to ruin them. From morning to night, bathing, eating, sleeping, I was brooding over this, and I could get no proper rest At midnight I used to get up and think how this ruin might be done until I was as one mad I learnt to fire at targets, to ride, also sword and club exercise I have great love of arms, and always kept two or three guns five or six swords, spears etc by me'

Vasudeo's self confession obviously reveals a rather morbid disposition of mind He seems to have suffered a persecution mania But the persecution complex in him was not centred on his personal ego, as in most other cases of mental disease, it encompassed all his fellow Indians whom he imagined victims of British rule and oppression like himself There was certainly an unhealthy strain in his urge to get full redress for his grievances But the manner in which he attempted to achieve his purpose showed great ingenuity and a high degree of logical thinking

When Vasudeo found that all his eloquence was in vain and nobody was moved by his lectures and exhortations he decided on an armed revolt For he was determined to lead his country men to freedom and prosperity According to his own statement his aim was to drive the British out of the country restore Hindu religion to its pristine purity and establish Hindu reign (*raj*) He saw himself as the saviour of Hindu India In fact, during his campaign, the rumour was spread that Vasudeo had declared himself to be an incarnation (*avatar*) of Shivaji Maharaj

But in contrast to most other leaders of messianic movements Vasudeo lacked that self confidence and sure sense of 'mission' which had inspired other Messiahs However, he gained reassurance through prayer during his visits to many sacred shrines before setting out on his campaign He allowed his hair and beard to grow long hung a pilgrim's bag over his shoulder, and begged all the way from Bombay to Nasik, Indore, Nagpur, Kolhapur, Miraj Baroda etc He visited all the Hindu shrines on the way and prayed to the gods for success At each place he

made it a point to preach to the people and foster opposition to the British rulers.

After the initial failure of his revolt, he again retreated to a temple to pray. Prayer revived his spirit and resolution to liberate the Indian nation from the yoke of oppression and from moral decay. Even during his campaign he constantly visited temples at various places to pray; thus, for instance, previous to the dacoity at Dhamari he visited Kandoba's temple at Chinchose and before looting Sonapur he passed the night with his gang at Amarinath's temple in Dowlata's Wada where he prayed long and fervently for guidance and courage.

After his return from a long pilgrimage he took a solemn vow to devote his whole life henceforth to the liberation of India. With this purpose in mind, he set to work and collected bands of young men, explained to them the virtue of patriotism and began to give them training in the use of arms. He disclosed to them his intention to start an armed revolt against the British usurpers as they were the main obstacle for the Hindu *raj* which he wanted to establish.

Vasudeo found little sympathy for his patriotic aspirations among the people of his own social status. They were not prepared to endanger their lives or to sacrifice their jobs and income even for the liberation of India. Vasudeo consequently found himself obliged to turn for support to an altogether different set of people. Chief among these were the Ramoshis (lit., 'descendants of Ram') who in pre-British times used to serve in the lower ranks of the police. In 1826 they had risen in revolt against the British and consequently been deprived of their jobs. They were a turbulent lot and for several years they had carried on their depredations before they could be subdued by the British. Vasudeo found them well disposed towards his cause and ready to serve under him. Many servants, out of employment, too were ready to join him, as well as simple peasants of the Maharashtra villages whom his eloquent pleading had won over. His would-be followers, being penniless, looked to him for support, and Vasudeo, lacking any funds, conceived the idea of securing money through dacoity.

He describes his plan in detail in his autobiography: 'Having obtained five thousand rupees from a money-lender I proposed

to send to all sides three or four men a month in advance that small gangs might be raised by them from which great fear would come to the English. The mails would be stopped, and the railway and telegraph interrupted, so that no information could go from one place to another. Then the jails would be opened and all the long term prisoners would join me because if the English Government remained they would not get off. If I obtained two hundred men even should I not be able to loot the treasury I should carry out my intention of releasing criminals. With a band, even though it be small, if the foundation is good, it shall grow big and conquer a government. There is much ill feeling among the people and now if a few make a beginning those who are hungry will join. Many men are inclined to begin, and the result will be good.

As an inauguration of his revolutionary campaign, Vasudeo arranged a big meeting on 20-21 February, 1879 at Loni Khand, a village twelve miles from Poona on the Nagar Road. At the gathering he was able to recruit a small gang of about forty to sixty men. A few of them were Brahmins like himself, but chiefly they were Ramoshis. A few villagers of good standing were sympathizers of the movement though they did not take an active part in the robberies.

Two days after the feast Vasudeo committed a dacoity at the village of Dharami in Sirur which he attacked with his followers. They looted about four hundred rupees and had a short skirmish with the police. It appears that public sympathy towards them was not lacking. A lady of a distinguished family prepared food for his party during the two days they were in hiding in the ravines before committing this dacoity. After the deed four men warned them that on the morrow the cavalry were coming after them.

Vasudeo, hunted by the police fled from place to place. He could successfully evade the police because he was sheltered and befriended by both high and low. In the course of his wanderings Vasudeo tried to enlist the support of the villagers and spoke to them a good deal so that they might trust him. 'I said you must tell all your relatives and have no fear and understand that the day of comfort for the *ryots* has come'. They agreed to all this and brought him milk and curds.

Subsequently, several dacoities were committed by Vasudeo

and his gang to get money, as at Valeh in Purandhar, Hami and Nandgari in Bhor, Sonapur in Haveli Chankhed in Maval, and other places. Merchants (Banias), and even a fat Bania lady were beaten and tortured to make them disclose their hidden treasures, and the promissory notes of debtors were burned. Vasudeo planned to loot the government treasury and to destroy the railway lines, but he was rudely disillusioned by the conduct of the Ramoshis who were not inspired by any patriotic ideas and merely looted for their own benefit.

Vasudeo was, however, impressed by the loyalty of the Dhangars (shepherd caste) and he tried to invoke the support and sympathy of the villagers to his cause by explaining his aims and objects. On 29 March he went to Nanagaum with his party, and they were supplied with provisions by the village headman (*patel*) for two days. There he addressed the people.

On that very night Vasudeo committed two dacoities and got money, but quarrels started about its distribution, and Vasudeo found that the Ramoshis had misappropriated part of the loot without even informing him. Disappointed and disgusted with the Ramoshis, the only class who had joined him in any considerable number, Vasudeo left them. He found it impossible to carry out the plans of rebellion for which he had given up his career as the leader of a band merely intent on plunder.

'I determined,' he wrote on 2 April, 'to go and pray at the shrine of Sri Shaila Malik Arjun (Shiva) in Kurnool District, and if my prayer was not heard destroy myself.' His intention was as he explained to sacrifice himself for the people's welfare and to pass into the other world with the purpose of pleading on behalf of the people of India before the just court of God. It appears that Shivaji had visited the same temple in 1677, and it is related² that in a moment of religious exaltation he had decided to end his life at Sri Shaila, though for a different motive. He had accomplished his mission and established his kingdom. He believed he would find no better place to die in and therefore decided to cut off his own head. With difficulty he was prevented by his friends from carrying out this plan.

After reaching the shrine safely in spite of police supervision Vasudeo decided to write his autobiography. He wanted to

² Cf. Jadunath Sarkar *Shivaji and His Times* Calcutta 1948 p. 781.

analyse his motives and to purify his mind. He searched for the reasons why his plans had failed and the flaws that were hidden in his disposition. He was deeply disappointed by his lack of success. He resolved to invoke the divine aid by rigorous penance. He went on a complete fast and ceased to take even water though he suffered an attack of fever. Sitting entranced in deep meditation before the figure of the deity, he decided to continue his fast for seven days. If the god would fail to send him enlightenment in his predicament he would sacrifice his life by cutting off his head. Then he began to write his autobiography.

On the seventh day when owing to his fast and fever his spirits were very low he unsheathed his sword and prepared to cut off his own head in front of the deity in sacrifice. But a Brahmin residing in the temple prevented the deed and dissuaded him from carrying out this desperate act. Slowly Vasudeo recovered his mental balance and returned to his former plan of liberating India. Also his health improved under the affectionate care of some friends.

He returned to Ghanur or Gangpur not far from Sholapur. In spite of the reward of three thousand rupees offered for his capture no one betrayed him and he found friendly shelter everywhere. He fell ill but recovered again. During this time he seems to have turned finally from the Ramoshis and thought of recruiting the Rohillas. His bad luck seemed to take a turn for the better when Ismael Khan the Rohilla leader promised him five hundred men and others promised to provide fighters for a new campaign. Finally Vasudeo was able to sign an agreement for the recruitment of nine hundred men.

In the meantime however the British police did not remain idle. Major Daniell Superintendent of the Poona Police on information supplied by spies arrived on 20 July at Ghanur and surrounded the village but Vasudeo was able to slip through the police cordon. However his papers fell into the hands of Major Daniell. Some highly incriminating documents that had been thrown into the river by a friendly old lady were recovered by the watchful police. Among the papers were a Bombay army map, Vasudeo's diary and several proclamations offering a reward of ten thousand rupees or five thousand rupees for the Governor's head (with a sliding scale for lesser European officers).

There was also a letter written by an astrologer recommending the rebel leader to Maulvi Mahmood Sahib who was the head of the Arabs, Rohillas and Sikhs in the Nizam's service. Vasudeo fled from place to place, but was pursued day and night by the police until one night they came across him sleeping in a temple at Dever Nadagi, in Hyderabad State, and arrested him.

Vasudeo Balvant Phadke was accused of assembling men, arms and ammunition with the intention of waging war against the Queen and of exciting disaffection towards the Government. The friend who had given him shelter at Ghanur turned traitor and revealed everything to the police. He became Queen's witness at the trial.

In November 1880 Vasudeo was sentenced to transportation for life. There was great public interest in his trial, and the vast crowd which assembled during his trial shouted repeatedly "Victory to Vasudeo!" After his conviction Vasudeo was brought in fetters to the railway station at Poona, where an English lady stepped up to him and presented him with a bunch of flowers.

In the newspapers Vasudeo was hailed as the harbinger of a bright future for India and praised for trying to relieve the misery of his countrymen. Some classed him among the great benefactors of mankind, and approved of his intentions, though they condemned his methods of securing funds—by dacoity, extortion and the torture of innocent men and women.

The British Government decided to send Vasudeo to Aden and not to the Andamans. Though fettered and placed in solitary confinement in Aden Vasudeo one day effected his escape, but was recaptured the same day. From 1882, in the hope of getting his release through sickness he reduced his food intake by half and developed tuberculosis, and, before he could be granted an amnesty, died on 17 February 1883.

After Vasudeo had left the Ramoshus and gone on pilgrimage to Kurnool, his place was taken over by his lieutenant Daulata Ramoshi, of Kedgaon in Haveli. After a few dacoities of a trifling nature a big robbery was committed by a large number of Ramoshus at Palaspe in the Panvel area. The robbers got away. But in May 1883 Major Daniell succeeded in surprising the gang. Daulata was killed with five of his men, and the gang utterly dispersed.

Another band, whose rising was instigated by Vasudeo Phadke consisted of Kolis of Purandhar Ghera and was headed by Krishna Sabla, a former police officer and his son. The Kolis believed themselves unjustly deprived of a large portion of their cultivable land. In the course of seven months they committed twenty eight dacoities. This band was broken up towards the end of the year by Major Wise. The majority of the dacoits including Krishna Sabla and his son were arrested and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.

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5 AMONG THE WARLIS

In the districts north of Bombay and in South Gujarat — more exactly, in Thana, Dharampur and Bansda districts — resides an important primitive tribe the Warlis. Their number amounts to almost 300,000. According to their own traditions they originally lived in the Konkan on the south west coast of India. Until recent times they were rather primitive in their habits and practised the slash and burn cultivation. Being primitive, backward and ignorant in the eyes of the superior cultivating Hindu castes as well as the Parsi and Muslim landlords, the Warlis were considered merely fit to serve them as tenants and field labourers. In this position they were exploited mercilessly. Even the lands which the Warlis had owned in the past were gradually being acquired — often by fraud or force — by the superior cultivating classes.

The Congress Party under Mr. B. G. Kher started the Adivasi Seva Mandal (Association for the Service of Aborigines) to assist the Warlis in their plight, but little effective assistance could be given them as long as social workers were not prepared to attack the vested interests of the exploiting landlords, usurers and forest contractors.

The deplorable economic and social situation of the Warlis

had effectively prepared the ground for a messianic movement, but no leader arose among them, they were all too dispirited. In the harvest season of 1944 about three thousand Warlis in Umbergaon *taluka* (county) organized a strike, demanding higher wages for agricultural work, but the strike failed, as they received no help from any quarter — nor even from the Adivasi Seva Mandal.

However, in early 1945, a very energetic Maratha lady, Mrs Godavaribai Parulekar, an ardent Communist, along with some helpers paid a visit to the Warli villages of Thana district. She was campaigning for the first provincial conference of the (Communist) Maharashtra Kisan Sabha (Peasants' Union of Maharashtra), at Titavala in Thana district. What she observed on this preliminary visit made her their life-long, devoted and indignant advocate. As a convinced Communist she not only believed and preached that the future paradise on earth should be made accessible to the Warlis but she took effective steps to hasten its arrival.

She began her reform work by offering the Warlis expert legal advice and assistance in their struggle against the landlords. She tirelessly explained the law to them and pointed out that no landlord or forest contractor could demand forced labour, or labour without pay. She prosecuted landlords who had taken advantage of the economic dependence of the Warlis and kept Warli debtors practically in bondage as house and field slaves, and prostituted their women and girls. She won several court cases and so forced the exploiters of the Warlis to greater discretion.

After Mrs Parulekar had in this way gained the complete confidence of the grateful Warlis she organized unions and meetings among them. At the first meeting at Zari, in May 1945 under the auspices of the Kisan Sabha five thousand Warlis accepted her invitation to discuss their grievances. This unprecedentedly large gathering was in itself a great inspiration and encouragement for the oppressed and helpless Warlis. They became aware of their strength and realized the necessity of keeping united. Now they themselves held meetings at various places which were attended by thousands. The speakers were Warlis or Kisan Sabha workers.

Emboldened by the encouragement and assistance of the Communist lady leader and her active and devoted staff and by their success in the occasional skirmishes with certain landlords who had tried to assert their old privileges of domination over their former serfs the Warlis formed a union with the aim of ending all serf tenure and forced labour (*zeth*). By a strike they forced their landlords to pay them just wages for farm work at the beginning of the monsoon. Another strike — in October 1945 — was necessary before the landlords would agree to pay them a fixed price for grass cutting.

The landlords of the Warli tracts were naturally very disturbed by this agitation. As the campaign was peaceful and orderly the Government found no cause for suppressing it in spite of many complaints and accusations by the landlords. Finally the landlords decided on provoking the Warlis to violence so that the Government would have to step in to crush the movement. The rumour was spread that Mrs Parulekar would hold a meeting at Talawada near Bhulad at midnight on 10 October. It was also rumoured that the landlords had hired ruffians to break up the meeting and beat up Mrs Parulekar. The Warlis to protect their beloved leader assembled in thousands at Talawada armed with sticks, sickles and hatchets. At the same time the police was informed by the landlords that the Warlis were collecting at Talawada fully armed with the intention of staging a revolt and killing their landlords.

Armed police arrived at the meeting place and the Warlis were ordered to disperse. They refused to go home and it was alleged they threw stones at the police van. The police opened fire from the roof of their moving car. The firing was repeated on several occasions and the result was that five Warlis were killed and many wounded. The meeting was taking an ugly turn when fortunately a prominent worker of the Kisan Sabha arrived on the spot and advised the Warlis to disperse peacefully as Mrs Parulekar was sick and was lying in a hospital at Kalyan. There was no need to protect her.

The landlords had apparently succeeded in their ingenious plot. Not only had the Warlis been fired upon by the police but the Government had become alarmed, had issued a ban on all meetings, processions and assemblies and banished the

Communist leaders from the area and forbidden them to have any dealings with the Warlis. Some Communists were arrested on the charge of dacoity, and many Warlis were thrown into jail.

The repression of the agitation by rifle fire and imprisonment did not frighten the Warlis into abandoning their strike, but they remained peaceful and orderly in spite of provocation. Finally the landlords granted them higher wages and the strike could be called off.

In January 1946 the Kisan Sabha organized a conference of Warlis at Mahalakshmi in Bombay. Over fifteen thousand Warlis attended it, many had walked a distance of thirty miles to the meeting place. Mrs Parulekar became generally known as the 'uncrowned queen' of the Warlis, she became their prophetess whose lead they followed blindly. Ever since this time the Warlis have voted in large numbers for the Communist Party at elections.

The meetings and processions of the Warlis which the Communist leaders organize in order to rouse their spirits in opposition against their exploiters are cleverly directed to produce a peculiar mental attitude. Long marches are arranged resulting in great fatigue. During the processions red flags are carried aloft, slogans are shouted incessantly and with fists raised. The tireless leaders, placed strategically at certain intervals in the procession, shout short and catchy slogans, repeating them a hundred times. The procession shouts itself hoarse repeating the same slogans over and over enthusiastically and raising their clenched fists. After a while the leaders change the slogan, but the new one will express the same thing in other words.

The long marches, the incessantly repeated rhythmical shouting of slogans, the waving of red flags, the gathering of vast masses of people moved by the same grievances, the open defiance of their former masters and of Government and police authority — all these factors create an intoxicating and almost mystical feeling of solidarity. It predisposes all who take part in the gatherings to the deeds of violence and self-immolation so far, however, never demanded by the undisputed leader, Mrs Godavaribai Parulekar, and her faithful Communist helpers.

It frequently happens that members of the Warli tribe resort to violence when out to redress an injustice perpetrated by some landlord, government or police officer against a member of their

tribe They certainly have sufficient provocation for such outbursts

However so far the Warlis have not yet asked for autonomy in the districts in which they form a majority nor have they demanded the expulsion of all alien settlers who have legally or illegally acquired their land and exploited them economically It is only a question of time the demand will certainly be raised for a territory in which the Warlis can live without interference from the hated intruders in which they can live according to their old and sacred traditions and customs in peace and prosperity But of course under the pressure of overpopulation no government can possibly grant them sufficient land on which to live in their own old leisurely fashion and in exclusive independence

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MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS AMONG THE BHILS

THE aboriginal Bhils in western India — Rajputana western Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat — are settled in loose groups, much interspersed with Hindu and Muslim cultivating and artisan castes. Of great numerical strength — over two million were returned in the last census as Bhils — the tribe is broken up into a number of separate endogamous sub-sections which have little in common but the name. Some sub-sections are more Hinduized, others less, the more Hinduized sections claiming higher social rank for this reason.

The Bhils are known in the annals of Rajputana and western Madhya Pradesh as the implacable enemies of the Rajputs who disputed the possession of western India with the Bhils, the earlier settlers. Gradually the Bhils were driven from the fertile land at the foot of the hills into the wild and dry Aravalli Hills, later on the country at the base of the Western Ghats also was wrested from them, but they retained a precarious hold over the hilly tracts there and in Khandesh. The Bhils in the plains were generally good cultivators but those in the hilly regions were mostly freebooters by sheer necessity. In frequent raids they swooped down from their mountain fastnesses and robbed the peaceful cultivators who tilled the fields of the Rajput landlords. The Rajputs, skilled and brave warriors repelled the Bhil robbers with ferocious severity in continuous skirmishes and wars.

By the time the British arrived on the scene and gradually took over the administration, the struggle was almost over but the Bhils still rose a few times against their hated oppressors. It was now up to the British to defeat them and to restore peace and order. There was for instance, such a rising of the Bhils in 1817-18 in Khandesh. The insurgents numbered about eight thousand, but the troubles subsided partly because of military action and partly because of the conciliatory policy adopted by the British administrators. In 1819 there was another and more general insurrection when the Bhils entrenched themselves in several outposts and ravaged the neighbouring plains. Several British detachments

sent against them destroyed the Bhil settlements in punitive actions killed many of them and subjected others to severe punishment.

With occasional lulls the insurrection of the Bhils continued. The situation worsened in 1825 after the reported reverses of the British in the Burmese War. Sewram, a blacksmith induced the Bhils of Baglana to rise by producing forged letters purported to have been written by the Rājā of Satara. In spite of vigorous military measures the predatory activities of the Bhils continued and even the village headmen were discovered to be in league with them. In 1831 the Bhils of Dhar (in Malwa) were excited to rebellion by a political leader Uchet Singh who successfully led his Bhil levies against the Rājput ruler of the State so that the British had to intervene. Gradually however the dual measures of coercion and conciliation succeeded in converting the turbulent Bhils into more peaceful cultivators. There was a recrudescence of trouble in Malwa in 1846 but it was quickly put down. Still the Bhils remained suspects for many years to come and were treated more or less as a criminal caste.

With the pacification of western India through the British administration the cultural and religious penetration of the aboriginal tracts by a superior civilization set in with great intensity. It was carried out not only by Hindu landlords, traders and officials who permanently lived in the Bhil areas but also by wandering Hindu monks and ascetics.

It is obvious that the Bhil community whose economic condition had scarcely improved whose traditional beliefs and modes of life were now also being uprooted and subjected to severe criticism and attack by their Hindu masters provided a fertile soil for messianic movements. Certain individuals of outstanding personality were able to inspire movements which in some aspects at least resemble messianic agitations. These Bhil movements are marked by a definite tendency towards Hinduization. The reason for this is that quite a few of the self-styled Saviours and reformers of the Bhils have been high caste Hindus and ardent believers in Hindu asceticism. They convinced the Bhils that for a successful struggle against their oppressors and external enemies the acquisition of inner strength was an essential preparation. And in accordance with their ethical and religious beliefs this inner strength could only be acquired through the adoption of

the puritanical and ritualistic Hindu rules and restrictions of life

Most of these messianic movements of the Bhils therefore, whether successful or not, resulted in the partial Hinduization of the Bhil tribe

1 THE LASODIA MOVEMENT

In the last decades of the nineteenth century a reform movement was started among the Bhils by a certain Lasodia. This Lasodia who lived nearly three quarters of a century ago in Mahikantia and Dungarpur States and is said to have been a Bhil must have been a remarkable man. He proclaimed that he possessed divine powers which he had acquired through mystic communion with supernatural forces. He proved his superhuman status by eating broken glass and scrap iron¹

The Bhils were astounded they had never seen anything like it and were convinced of Lasodia's divine nature. His reputation spread rapidly over the whole Bhil country. The Bhils listened spellbound to his instructions. He preached devotion to the god Rama. He advised his followers to lead a righteous virtuous life. Deception theft adultery rape and the like should never even be mentioned among them. All the traditional practices of witchcraft and magic should be abolished and god Rama alone should be worshipped. All kinds of meat and alcoholic drink should be taboo.

The positive commands to be observed were the usual ones. New converts were encouraged to bathe daily to wash their clothes and avoid close association with other castes especially low ones. They should practise non violence and periodically sing devotional songs (*bhajans*) in praise of Rama.

After Lasodia's death his movement was continued by his disciples. Many followers however slackened in their zeal after a period of fervour. At times they even reverted to their old manner of living and indulged in strong drink and the eating of meat.

2 THE GOVINDGIRI MOVEMENT

Another reform movement was inaugurated by Govindgiri or Govind Guru. His sect was subsequently known by the name of Nath panthi.

It began during the severe famine which visited the Bhil country around 1900. The crops failed completely and men and cattle perished in great numbers. Vinda, a Govalia Banjara (a caste of semi-nomadic goods carriers and, in former times, military camp followers), resident of the village Vedsa in Dungarpur District (at that time a princely State), deserted his home after his wife, children and all his cattle had fallen victim to the famine. He moved into the neighbouring State of Sunt-Rampur and Godra where he settled down in some unknown village. There he married the widow of his elder brother. Soon after his marriage he became the disciple of a Hindu monk (*gosain*) called Rajgiri. Vinda changed his name to Govindgiri. Around 1909 he returned with his wife and children to his old village of Vedsa.

At Vedsa Govindgiri decided on a religious career. First he arranged a big feast and lit a sacred fire (*dhuni*). He declared that he was an incarnation of God and that it was his mission to reform the degenerate Bhils. Somehow the Bhils believed him and his fame spread. It travelled widely into the surrounding regions of Dungarpur, Banswara, Sunt Rampur, Idar, Panch Mahals and even further. All these tracts are inhabited mainly by Bhil groups.

The Bhils soon began to flock to Govindgiri's residence and to ask for admission into his sect. The new religious leader initiated them all and instructed them in his new faith. He preached devotion to Rama, he forbade inter-dining with outsiders, even with Brahmans, he encouraged pious and virtuous living and the company of good people, his followers should always speak the truth and abandon all kinds of falsehood, they should not steal, nor lust for another man's wife, they should abstain from meat and wine, they should bathe daily and wear clean clothes.

The new faith succeeded in attracting a large number of converts among the Bhils who hoped to raise their social status through it. With this increase in number of the movement's followers Govindgiri's reputation grew. Gradually the Bhils began to believe in his claim that he was a divine incarnation and actually accorded him divine honours. The Ruler of Dungarpur even invited him to his palace and listened graciously to his devotional songs (*bhajans*). Govindgiri sent his disciples

out into the neighbouring villages to light the sacred fire in new centres and to spread his faith from there over the whole region. In a few years large sections of the Bhil tribe in the districts around Dungarpur became ardent followers of Govindgiri.

The rapid rise of his influence seems to have turned the head of the self made religious leader. He began to plan nothing less than a Bhil kingdom of which he would be the head. As the first step in the realization of his ambitious plan Govindgiri retreated with an armed batch of his most faithful Bhil followers to the Mangarh Hills on the border between Banswara and Sunt Rampur. This happened at the end of 1911 or in early 1912. From this inaccessible stronghold Govindgiri began to recruit a Bhil army and terrorize the whole neighbourhood. Finally the Raja of Sunt Rampur sent his well armed state troops fortified by the Mewar Bhil Corps and British artillery, against the badly armed and poorly organized Bhil army of Govindgiri.

The wily pretender avoided as long as possible an open clash with the regular troops, but in November 1912 he was forced to accept battle and was completely defeated. The ill disciplined Bhils fled when they saw their companions being killed and wounded. Govindgiri along with his lieutenants was captured, tried and sentenced to transportation for life.

But after eight years he was pardoned and set free. He was even allowed to return home. However, in prison he had become addicted to hemp smoking (*ganja*). He was a very sick man and died a few years later. Thus ended ingloriously the career of a man who had proclaimed himself an incarnation of God and who had aspired to the crown of a Bhil king.

In spite of the defeat and inglorious end of the founder of the new sect Govindgiri's movement did not die out completely. His chief disciples managed to keep the sect alive and gain even new disciples for the Nath panthi. Even today it is an important religious sect among the Bhils of Dungarpur.

The leaders of the sect are called Baba or Bawoz. Their office is hereditary. At intervals of four to eight weeks a meeting is held at their huts where the members of the sect gather for a night of singing. Two to three hundred folk come together, including women and children. Devotional songs (*bhajans*) are sung throughout the night, the Baba accompanying the singing.

on his primitive violin. In the morning all take part in a meal of maize gruel and goat's meat. The goat for the meal is donated by the organizer of the meeting.

Three or four times a year the members of the sect are visited by the leaders. On this occasion they are taught to recite their prayers and to sing sacred songs.

A specimen of such a song may be given here. It describes the Bhil belief in a Golden Age.

In the early days there existed a sign

Only Ram and the Evil One could understand it

In those days many cows existed

The men drank only milk, nobody did any work

Good and wicked people were unknown

A child was conceived by the looking of one into another's eyes

The men built no houses, they ate only leaves and fruits

For sleeping they used a stone pillow

And they lived in mountain caves

They became engaged when they were three hundred years old

And married when they were five hundred

They lived a thousand years

3 THE GULIA MOVEMENT

A similar but more peaceful movement was started in West Khandesh by a Bhil named Gulia. He later earned the honorific title of *Maharaj* (religious teacher lit. Great King). Gulia likewise began a reform campaign of a more or less religious nature.

He preached to the Bhils, gave them religious instruction and advised them to suppress all customs which proved offensive to the Hindus. He urged them especially to abandon drinking *toddy* (palm wine) and *Mahua* liquor (*Bassia latifolia*) to which the Bhils were much addicted.

The Bhils were overawed by a religious teacher whom even the Hindus respected though he was himself only a Bhil, therefore they flocked in large numbers to his residence to listen to his instructions. It is said that at times from fifty to seventy thousand

Bhils attended the gatherings which Gulia organized with the help of his disciples. In these mass meetings not only was Rama worshipped, but Gulia was praised in songs as the reformer of the Bhils. Indeed, influenced by Gulia's teaching many Bhils abjured alcoholic drink and became strict teetotallers.

This displeased the local liquor dealers greatly for they lost much business on his account. One day Gulia was found murdered in his room. It was rumoured that the liquor sellers had killed him but the murderers were never discovered.

With Gulia's death the movement had lost its leader and gradually collapsed, and the Bhils returned to their *toddy* and *Mahua* liquor. Another hope of the Bhils for social improvement and religious reform was dashed by the untimely death of Gulia.

4 THE VISVANATH MOVEMENT

Another reform movement was initiated by a Hindu monk Visvanath Maharaj among the Bhils and Dhankas of Rewa Kantha. It is claimed that he converted about seventy five thousand people during his lifetime.

He was a Brahmin by caste and hailed from Benares his father's name being Jatashankar and his mother's Gandharbar. He came over to Gujarat and dedicated himself to the task of uplifting all poor people. He settled at Anand and sat in meditation in a cave. As people were coming for firewood they saw him and old Bhils like Lakhva Harji and Rama Mora requested him to teach them some incantations (*mantras*). Visvanath agreed to do it.

He persuaded them to worship the Hindu gods and made many disciples by giving them *kanthis* i.e. cotton strings similar to the sacred thread (*janew*) worn by the twice-born but in this case round the neck. He made his followers conform to orthodox Hindu customs and practices. The *bhagats* as his followers were called at the time of their initiation had to take the vow not to drink *Mahua* liquor and *toddy* to abstain from eating meat and to observe strictly all the Hindu food taboos. A disciple of Visvanath Maharaj was not even permitted to accept food from his own wife if she had not joined the movement. At Juna Rajpipla a Bhil Bhagat was known to prepare his own food in his own house over a separate hearth because the other members of his family

refused to join the movement and to observe the strict rules of the *bhagats*

Over and above the observance of these new regulations, Visvanath's devotees were obliged to pay an annual visit to their spiritual head and to render him the respect due to a religious preceptor (*guru*). This consisted in a full prostration before him.

Visvanath's reputation grew in the course of time, and he is said to have performed miracles. The miracles recorded are of the type usually believed in by the worshippers of Hindu saints, e.g., converting sea water into fresh water.

Visvanath celebrated many sacrificial feasts (*yagna*) in the tribal areas. He built a temple of Ranchodji at Padakola, three miles from Tanakhla railway station.

Visvanath Maharaj died in 1915. One of his descendants is living at Padakola and another at Gabhana as head priests. Some of his close disciples still observe fast on all full moon days, and take only one meal on Saturdays. But on the whole the movement collapsed with Visvanath's death and most of the Bhil disciples of the reformer glided back into the more easy life of ancient Bhil tradition. In fact, the strict puritanical ideals of orthodox Hinduism cannot be observed by tribals like the Bhils without damage to their mental and physical health. Life without singing and dancing, stimulated by alcoholic drinks so much frowned upon by the orthodox Hindus would be unspeakably drab and monotonous in those lonely and wild hills, and abstinence from meat and other foods forbidden to Hindus would deprive the Bhils of valuable nourishment and condemn them to malnutrition. Healthy instinct and sheer commonsense prompted them to abandon the strict food taboos and the puritanism of the orthodox Hindu castes. Such ideals can only be sustained with a fairly high standard of living.

5 THE MAVAJI GURU NA BHAGAT MOVEMENT

In the last decade an old reform movement started to make new converts among the Bhils. It is called the Mavaji guru na bhagat movement, or the Beneshwar na bhagat movement. The founder of the sect was a certain Mavaji while Beneshwar is the commonly known centre of the association. But today the actual centre is Sabala, a village about four miles from Beneshwar in

the District of Durgapur Mavaji lived it is believed nearly three centuries ago. His life story is not well known. Some maintain that he was a Brahmin by caste others that he was a Bhil. Most probably he was a low caste Hindu.

Tradition records that owing to his virtues and to his life of devotion to Rama Mavaji was highly respected by all people — even Brahmins — throughout the region of Durgapur, Binswara and the adjoining areas. He is reputed to have possessed exceptional spiritual powers and to have written a sacred book on the history of the universe from its very creation. The book also contains an account of the future fate of the world. It is handwritten. At present it is in the possession of the head of the sect. It is alleged that it is written in an unknown script decipherable only by the succeeding heads of the sect who read out excerpts from it to the devotees once a year. The God of the sect is *Kalki avatar* — the tenth and still expected incarnation of Vishnu. The present successors to the sect (*gaddis*) of Mavaji are Brahmins. It seems that they have been holding this position for many generations.

Owing to the probably low origin of Mavaji the sect initially gained a following more in the low and lower middle sections of the Hindu population, but in the last ten years the sect has been making many conversions among the Bhils.

The tenets of the sect closely resemble those of the Lasodia movement but here the emphasis is more on the periodical singing of devotional songs (*bhajans*). It is also more insistent on the observance of abstinence from meat and liquor. Commensality with members of other sects and castes is strictly forbidden even Brahmins are not excepted from it. Unlike the Lasodia *bhagats* who are obliged to put up white flags on their houses the Mavaji *bhagats* are forbidden to do so.

Recently other sects have started propaganda among the Bhils for instance the Kabir panthis and the Runija Bhagat Movement. So far they have had little success.

It must not be forgotten that these Hindu reform movements are strongly supported by all high caste Hindus living among the Bhils as landlords, traders, moneylenders, forest contractors, officials and social workers. As a reward for the strict observance of the Hindu food taboos and ethical precepts they hold out to

the Bhils their final incorporation into the Hindu society and the recognition of the Bhils as a respectable caste. In spite of this promise of a rise in social status the majority of the Bhils are reluctant to part from their old habits and thus lose their Bhil identity. For they still dream of a Golden Age in the distant past when they had their own kings and when they were mighty warriors and lucky hunters roaming the forests free and independent. With the complete adoption of the Hindu way of life they would lose their Bhil identity and so forfeit their future happiness in the eventuality of a return of that former Golden Age of the Bhils!

6 AMONG THE GAMITS

The Gamits of Gujarat are one of the numerous sub sections of the Bhil tribe. As a community they are already highly Hinduized. The process of Hinduization is well illustrated in the life story of one member of the tribe, a leading propagandist of the Hindu faith in his community.

Kushensingh Amarsingh Gamit was born in 1895 in the small village of Ghata near Vyara in Songadh. He belongs to a family for several generations well known for its religious zeal and piety. Kushensingh's great grandfather was Dhuriabhai who built and endowed a temple of Rama in the village. Ever since the family was greatly devoted to Rama and Hanuman. The village Ghata lies on the high road leading from Nasik to Rameshwar in the South. In the times when pilgrims still journeyed on foot or in bullock carts they often used to stop overnight at Ghata when they passed through the village. Dhuriabhai provided a free meal to all the *sadhus* making the pilgrimage.

Dhuriabhai's son Devji Bhagat continued the tradition which his father had established. Possibly he was even more religious minded. Sri Zaverchand Meghani, the well known Gujarati author, described him in his book *Mansau a Dua* as a saint of this modern Kali Yuga (iron age). Used from childhood to the company of many pilgrims from various places and of *sadhus* with high standing he acquired a good general and religious knowledge though he did not go to school. Even government officials used to stop at his house when visiting the village for his family was a most respected one.

Devji's son Amarsingh maintained the family tradition. His

son, Kishensingh, however, was destined to become the foremost Gunit leader. He began his education in the small village school in 1902. Being an outstanding pupil he secured a place as boarder in the Baroda State School at Songadh. There he was well-liked by his teachers and was especially proficient in dramatics and drill. After completing his primary school education in 1918, he entered the high school. He finished his education in 1921 with the Commerce G. I. C. examination.

While still a student, he became interested in social reforms and used to give lectures on this subject. Later he assisted his father in his good work. But in 1934 it happened that the Gaekwar of Baroda paid a visit to Vyara and Kishensingh headed the delegation from Ghata. During the meeting of the tribal people on this occasion in which Kishensingh took a prominent part, he caught the attention of the Gaekwar. The result was that Kishensingh was appointed Inspector under the Raniparaj Committee. Later he joined the Baroda State Service in the education department. He rose to be an Assistant Educational Inspector.

In the years of his service, he did much useful work. He successfully promoted the building of many new schools and was responsible for many welfare schemes for school children. He got many tribal children admitted to the state hostel and thus secured them a higher education. As inspector he was a strict disciplinarian and saw to it that the teachers under him did their duty and were punctual. The schools under his control were known to be the best in attendance and in educational results.

But Kishensingh was also interested in other things. He collected medicinal plants and sent them to Ayurvedic doctors in Bombay. Thus he acquired a good knowledge of the healing qualities of herbs and roots which he put to good use in treating the sick in his village.

In 1941, as he had promised his dying father, he took over the charge of his house and estate. In 1943 he retired from service and settled down as a farming landlord. Highly respected by his community he manages his house and farm and the Ramji temple. He also runs a charitable institution which provides free food to the poor.

Without attaching himself to any political party, he does a lot

of social work among the people of his tribe. For some time he acted also as President of the local Gamit Panch.

7 AMONG THE DHODIAS

The Dhodias are another sub-section of the Bhils residing in Gujarat. Hindu reformers are active among them also. But more influential are the Hinduized tribal leaders while the high-caste social workers are generally met with suspicion and reserve. One of these tribal reformers is Hirabhai Dhanabhbai Bhagat. He is himself a Dhodia and a remarkable example of a Hindu missionary among his own people. He is highly respected for his integrity and piety.

It is said that some years ago Hirabhai was in a mental crisis over his religion—a state that lasted over two years. During this time he wandered about aimlessly in search of a better life. He went to various places of pilgrimage like Nasik and Benares and began to frequent the Hindu temples. Eventually he recovered from his doubts which had brought on a nervous breakdown and he returned home, but his wanderings had convinced him that the tribal gods and goddesses were futile and that the Dhodias must turn to the Hindu religion.

Since Hirabhai is a hereditary tribal *bhagat* (*shaman* or medicine man) the Dhodias are in the habit of consulting him in all their material and spiritual matters. He has always been their trusted counsellor. When divining the future and curing disease by magic Hirabhai carries out the traditional rites using grain on a winnow fan or waving peacock feathers over the patients. But Hirabhai admits that he no longer believes in the Dhodia gods and is now a worshipper of the Hindu gods. In his practices as a *bhagat* he has therefore exchanged his former Dhodia texts for incantations and devotional songs addressed to the Hindu gods Vishnu Hanuman Ganpati etc. By retaining the external rites of Dhodia shamanism he continues to retain his control over the Dhodias, but he maintains that he has converted his caste fellows to a kind of simplified Hinduism. Gradually he hopes to purify them of their superstitions, their belief in witchcraft and in the efficacy of magical cures of disease.

Hirabhai is besides a *bhagat* also a small farmer, but in his possession are only two and half acres of land. However, he has

adopted modern methods of cultivation and gets a good yield from his field. He is therefore fairly prosperous. He has two wives who are sisters and maintains a family consisting of seven persons. He wears homespun (*khadi*) dress like other social workers. For two days of the week he devotes himself to his work as *bhagat* when he serves about twenty clients a day. In the evenings he goes out and frequently gives lectures to his fellow Dhodias trying to free his tribe from superstition, bigotry and backwardness and so converting it by imperceptible degrees to Hinduism.

It would be presumptuous to call men like Hirabhai a Messiah equal in importance and aim to Govindgiri and Gulia. But there is no doubt that he is one of the many tribal leaders who want to bring happiness and prosperity to their fellow tribesmen by introducing incisive social and religious reforms. Such men form the material out of which powerful Messiahs arise when time and situation are opportune.

8 AMONG THE GRASIA BHILS

An aboriginal tribe of Mahi Kantha 'on the Banks of the Mahi', i.e. in north-eastern Gujarat the Grasias are said to be an offshoot of the Bhils from whom they separated many generations ago. They were in the past much feared for their criminal propensities. The commonest forms of offence committed by them were theft, dacoity, cattle-lifting, causing hurt and murder.

But in the latter half of the nineteenth century a Hindu ascetic Kheradi Surmal by name succeeded in converting a number of them to a more virtuous life. Kheradi Surmal was a follower of the Hindu god Rama (the seventh incarnation of Vishnu). He introduced high-caste Hindu customs among the Grasias by holding out the promise of social uplift for them, asserting that they would be recognized by the Hindus as a respected caste if they reformed. This meant of course no eating of the flesh of domesticated animals, no drinking of liquor and no offences such as dacoity and cattle-lifting.

Up to 1880 Kheradi Surmal was able to convert about eight hundred Grasias to the new life and in the following thirty years

In the opinion of T B Naik, who has deeply studied the Bhils in the north of the old Bombay State, the readiness of the Bhils to accept the preachings of the Hindu reformers is due to a feeling of guilt or sin. The Hindu reformers have succeeded in convincing the Bhils that their adverse economic and low social condition is the result of their 'bad' and 'immoral' habits. They can hope to improve their desperate situation only if they gain religious 'merit' by turning away from their tribal way of life and adopting the 'virtuous' Hindu life.

T B Naik fears that the 'reformed' Bhils will not be satisfied with a mere improvement of their economic and social standards, but that they, like the aboriginal tribes in East Pakistan, Bihar, Orissa, and the Thana district of Maharashtra State, will also turn against 'the foreigners in their own land' and demand their departure, and that they will ask for at least a limited autonomy in their ancient homeland. These reform movements have an appeal for the Bhils because they hope that they will be able to recover through them that golden age of the past when they were free and happy, when no Rajputs, no British and no Indian Government officials, no Hindu nor Muslim landlords, nor moneylenders and traders disturbed their happiness and freedom.

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CHAPTER 9

MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS IN KANARA AND ANDHRA

I A KANARESE MESSIAH

AFTER the decline of Buddhism the Jain religion gained many followers in South India. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the Jains seem to have reached their highest peak of influence and expansion and many princes and practically the whole intelligentsia of South India had become Jains. However, towards the end of the twelfth century the old Hindu beliefs revived and reasserted themselves and in the following centuries the various largely abandoned or neglected Hindu sects and denominations experienced a second spring.

Foremost among the religious reformers and revolutionaries against the Jain religion in Kanara was Basava who reconverted a large part of the Kanarese population to the worship of the old god Shiva. Basava can rightly be considered a religious revolutionary because he not only abandoned his own traditional Brahmanic creed in favour of the new sect of Vira Shaivism but he also using his influential position in the state as minister of police and head of the army vigorously promoted the conversion of a large number of Jains to his own creed—the cult of the Lingam. But at the same time he used his religious influence for political purposes revolting as the legend relates openly against his king and brother in law. Basava was furthermore a social revolutionary. He abolished the caste system in his creed and reformed the social order prevailing in his time in Kanara by favouring the lower and under privileged classes against the high castes in spite of his own Brahmin origin.

It is unfortunate that reliable historical sources for Basava's biography are lacking. His life story as recorded in the *Jasala Purana* is highly legendary and heavily adorned with many rather fantastic miracles. The story is still more confused by the fact that Basava is frequently confounded with his nephew Chenna Basava who after him played a conspicuous role in the Lingayat religion. The life stories of both persons are largely woven into one

However, the very fact of the existence of a large number of Lingayats in South India — they number over three million and are spread over the whole of Karnataka, and as well in parts of Mysore State, Andhra and Madras State — is proof that this ardent promoter of Vira Shaivism was a remarkable personality and that the essential data of his life-story may be correct though they are interspersed with miraculous and fantastic incidents in the fashion of the medieval historians. But undoubtedly, there is a true core hidden in these legendary tales

Here we can only repeat the stories about Basava's life and achievements, as they are recorded in the legends. They need not be accepted as factual truth. However, in these stories Basava emerges as a true Messiah of the lower castes of Karnataka who held out for them the promise of a better life in this world and in the life to come. He was not an ordinary man, but, according to the legend, an incarnation of Nandi, Shiva's bull. His conversion movement was at the same time a revival movement, leading the people back to the old religion of South India, to Shaivism

The real founder of the Lingam cult is unknown. Members of the sect state that the *lingam* (symbol of Shiva — the phallus) which they wear and worship is the oldest object of worship in India, and that only the practice of wearing the *lingam* (in the form of a phallus in copper or silver, in a box, worn on a string tied around the neck) was introduced by Basava. There seems little reason to doubt that the Lingayats are right in describing Basava as the reviver of an old form of worship rather than the founder of a new creed.

Basava, whose name is variously written as Basav, Basavanna or Basavappa, was the son of Madiga Raya, and his wife Madevi. They were Aradhya¹ Brahmins of Hingaleshvaram, a village near Bagevadi about forty miles south-east of Bijapur.

Basava's parents were devout worshippers of Shiva, and as a reward of their piety Shiva commanded Nandi, his bull, to have himself reborn in their house. Thus Nandi became incarnate in Basava, which name in Kanarese means 'bull'. It is related that already in early youth Basava expressed his complete devotion to Shiva by refusing to worship any other deity besides Shiva. Nor would he recognize any other *guru* or religious teacher but Ishvara

¹ The word *aradhya* means 'reverend'.

(Shiva) For this reason he refused to recite the hymn to the sun (*gayatri*) which every Brahmin is supposed to recite in the morning Basava was prepared to forego investiture with the sacred thread of the twice born rather than recite the *gayatri*, an essential prayer at this ceremony His father was horrified by the blasphemous impiety of his precocious son and turned him out of his house² The young revolutionary, accompanied by his sister Akka Nagamma, who was greatly attached to him, made his way to Kalyan, about a hundred miles west of Hyderabad, then the capital of the country and the residence of Bijjal, a Jain king of the Kalachurya or Kalachari dynasty

Basava's maternal uncle who was minister of police at Kalyan, sheltered him in his house and appointed him to a post in the service of the state He also gave him his daughter Gangamma in marriage Basava further improved his fortunes by marrying his beautiful sister to the king The hostile Jaina tradition relates, however, that the king took her merely as a concubine Basava later went to Sangameshwar, where a leader of the Vira Shaiva sect lived He served the *guru* and was finally initiated into the sect When his father in law died the king recalled him to Kalyan and appointed him chief minister and general of the army

Basava was now in a position to promote the worship of his god Shiva and to favour the Vira Shaiva sect in its struggle against the Jains King Bijjal's faith in Jainism had already been somewhat undermined by a forerunner of Basava Ekanta Ramayya, an ardent worshipper of Shiva He is said to have laid a wager that if he cut off his own head Shiva would restore it to him seven days later by a miracle The Jains staked their God and their faith Ekanta Ramayya won the bet against the Jains who however, refused to honour it and be converted to Vira Shaivism King Bijjal heard about the miracle and summoned the Shrivacharya to his court where the feat was repeated before the king According to the *Basava Purana*, Basava himself was present at court when the miracle was performed

Due to his open partisanship of the Vira Shaiva sect Basava found his position as chief minister and general precarious He

² In deference to Basava's father the Aradhya Brahmins still recite the *gayatri* though they have joined Vira Shaivism The Lingayat Jangams do not eat with them because they consider their conversion not complete

therefore attempted to win the favour of the people of Kalyan by spending his wealth in lavish charities. At the same time he began to dismiss the old Jain state officials and to put his own friends in their places. When he thought his position sufficiently secure and strong enough to defy the Jains, the Smarthas and the Vaishnavas, he began to preach a religion whose adoration of the *lingam*, dislike of Brahmans, and contempt for child marriage and ceremonial impurity deliberately revived the early and non-Aryan beliefs of the lower classes of the people. But in the intention of winning over more easily the Jains Basava forbade his followers the consumption of flesh and liquor, for against both the Jains have an unsurmountable aversion.

However, in spite of these concessions, the Jains strongly opposed Basava's efforts to convert them. They accused Basava before the king of misappropriating state funds and using them for the support of his monk order (Jangam). The king called Basava to account who, smiling, handed the keys to the king. The treasury was found untouched. But the Lingayat legend maintains that this was a miracle which Basava worked. He had used the treasury of the king but had replenished it by a miracle. Basava is said to have worked many other miracles. Thus he turned corn into pearls, found treasures, fed the hungry, healed the sick and raised the dead. The mistress of a Jangam, a dancing girl, who envied Gangamma, Basava's wife, for the richness of her robes. Basava took his wife's robe off her body and gave it to the Jangam. Other dresses sprang from Gangamma's body and all were given to the Jangam.

Finally, however, King Bijjal also found that Basava was going too far in his zeal for the worship of the *lingam*. Probably stirred up by the Jains, he took steps to arrest Basava. But the minister managed to escape and successfully fought off a party sent in pursuit. He hastily summoned all his friends and followers and, when the Raja advanced in person to quell the rebellion, he defeated him and forced him to restore him to his post as minister and general.

The Jain records relate that, as soon as he was restored to power, Basava plotted to take the king's life. When the king returned from a successful expedition against the Silahara king of Kolhapur, Basava received him on the banks of the Bhima and

offered him a poisoned fruit. According to Jain accounts, the dying king enjoined his son Raya Murari to avenge his death. Basava, hearing of his approach, lost heart and fled to Ulvi in North Kanara (about twenty miles south of Supa). When Raya Murari arrived with his army, Basava realized that Ulvi could not stand a siege. He despaired and drowned himself in a well.

D. C. Gangoly,³ obviously following J. F. Fleet, doubts the authenticity of the story since the contemporary evidence suggests that Bijjal abdicated in favour of his son long before he died. The Lingayat accounts which seem to be more trustworthy state that the origin of the estrangement between Basava and King Bijjal was that the king, listening to malicious calumnies, had blinded two of Basava's staunchest followers, Allaya and Madhuvayya. Basava left the task of punishing the king's cruelty to his friend and disciple Jaggadeva, cursed Kalyan, and retired to Sangameshwar, the sacred meeting place of the Krishna and Malaprabha rivers about a hundred miles west of Bellary.

At Kalyan, soon after Basava had left, it became evident that the curse was taking its effect. The fortunes of Bijjal had passed away. This was accompanied by portentous signs. The crows cawed in the night and jackals howled by day, the sun was eclipsed, storms of wind and rain came on, the earth shook, and darkness overspread the heavens. The inhabitants of Kalyan were filled with terror.

Stirred by the taunts of his mother Parvati and supported by two Lingayat saints Mallaya and Bommaya, Jaggadeva, Basava's champion, swore to avenge Basava's wrong. The three men smeared their bodies with ashes, took swords and spears and their shields, and started out to march against the king. On their way to the palace a bull appeared whom they recognized as a form of Basava coming to their aid and the bull preceded them going all who came in its way. Thus they forced their way into the palace, passed through the rooms and penetrated the crowds of courtiers and guards and slew the king in his hall of state. That was in 1168. They emerged victoriously from the palace, dancing in front of the people and shouting that Bijjal had perished because he had lifted his hand against two of the saints of the new religion. A revolution broke out in the city man fought against

³ In R. C. Majumdar (1963) pp. 180-81

man, horse against horse, elephant against elephant, till Kalyan was destroyed.

Basava continued to live at Sangameshwar. He was weary of life; his task of reviving the old, true faith had been accomplished and he prayed to Shiva to set him free from the fetters of his material life. Shiva and Parvati came forth from the *lingam*, raised Basava and led him into the holy place, and he was seen no more. Flowers fell from the sky and his followers then knew that Basava had been absorbed into the *lingam*, that is, Shiva.

The leading principles and doctrines of Basava's faith were as follows: There is one God — Parma-Shiva — in whom the whole universe exists and to whom it returns in the end; it is he who guards from evil. Between this God and his worshipper no go-between is required and consequently there is no need for sacrifices, penances, pilgrimages, or fasts; nor is there any need for priests and Brahmins. All wearers of the *lingam* are equal, the Lingayat woman as high as the Lingayat man, and consequently she should not marry until mature and of age, and should have a voice in choosing her husband. As all worshippers of the *lingam* are equal all caste distinctions cease. A true believer and *lingam*-wearer cannot be impure, consequently birth, women's monthly sickness, and death cause the Lingayat no impurity. At death the true believer goes straight to Shiva's heaven, or, rather, into Shiva himself, consequently, his soul cannot wander into a low-caste man or an animal and he therefore needs no funeral rites to assist him on his way to heaven or to keep him from wandering on earth as an uneasy ghost. As Shiva is an all-powerful guardian the wearer of his emblem need fear no evil, astrology is therefore useless as the influence of the stars is powerless; the evil eye, wandering spirits, spells, and charms, can none of them harm the true Lingayat!

Many of these tenets of Basava are today not practised even by Shilvants and Banjigs, the strictest of the Jangams, and some of the lower classes of Lingayats, the Salis, Patta Salis, and some of the Sardars do not even wear the *lingam* though they profess to be Lingayats. The rules ignoring the Hindu traditions of ceremonial purity and abstinence from after-death rites are kept by the higher classes of Lingayats, but the lower classes tend to compromise with the prevailing Hindu traditions and practices.

The same applies to the other precepts of Basava. They are not strictly observed by the later generations who have adapted themselves again to Hindu standards and follow the rules and regulations common among the Hindu castes.

The Lingayats are divided into two main sections: clergy and lay people. The clergy, generally called Jangams, is divided into the Viraktas who are unmarried and the Gurusthalas who are married. The thirty-one sections of lay people may be arranged under three headings: four classes of True or Pure Lingayats, sixteen classes of Affiliated Lingayats, and eleven classes of 'Semi Lingayats'. The latter have in many cases been prevented from becoming genuine Lingayats by their attachment to flesh, food and liquor.

In many points the Lingayats seem to agree with the Jains rather than with the Brahmanical Hindus. Many Lingayat practices are pre-Aryan and southern, the result of Basava's attempts to win the lower orders and perhaps also the effect of the influence of low caste followers in the creed who managed in early times to rise to the rank of saints. In fact, among the Jangam saints are many Pariahs and women, but not one Brahmin.

The many conformities of Lingayat and Jaina rules about eating and drinking, about tenderness for life, and about the non-return of the spirits of the dead, suggest that many Lingayats were converts from Jainism. This view is supported by the fact that the strength of the Lingayats is in the Vani caste, who were formerly Jains, while the Panchams, today another leading branch of the Lingayats, represent the fifth and lowest class of Jains. It was natural that Panchams (low caste people) should take to a religion that did not consider widow marriage an offence.

The course of history also favoured a conversion of the masses from Jainism to Vira Shaivism. After the overthrow of the Chalachurya dynasty of Kalyan and the conversion to Vaishnavism of the Hoysala Ballal King Vishnu Vardhan (1117-38), the Karnatak Jains faced a decline. Their power was waning and it appeared that their protector Jineshwar failed to save them in this life while he gave them little to look forward to in the world to come. Thus Vira Shaivism appeared more attractive to the common people. The *lingam*, perhaps, could not save its wearer from trouble in this world, but it ensured him at least a

life of enjoyment in the next Basava's conceptions of the joys of heaven may have been as refined and idealistic as a Jaina's, especially those which he wrote down in his book. But what his followers, or at least his fighting followers, believed to be the fruits of *lingam* worship was a more robust enjoyment of sensual pleasures. They used to describe the Lingayat heaven, in the most vivid colours. The same idea of what a true believer can expect in his future life is revealed in the garlands, heavenly damsels and feasts carved on the Shaiva Virgallas or hero tomb-stones.

After Basava, his nephew Chennabasava, became the leader of the faith, and he was helped in his mission by a number of able and zealous apostles. The Vira Shaiva Movement gradually gained strength, and spread to the Andhra country and further south to Mysore. A number of mystic bards arose, who expounded Basava's doctrines in a popular and appealing manner. Their writings are known by the collective name Vachanashastra. Even in the humblest home in the Kanara country the Vachanas are current coin. The pithy epigrams of the Vachana writers have become proverbial in popular language. The one burden of their writings is to call men back from their sinful life and to take refuge in Shiva.

The reformist zeal of the Lingayat teachers and the spiritual fervour of the Vachana bards have combined in making Vira Shaivism the most popular faith in the Kanara country.

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2 AMONG THE MADIGAS

A typical example of messianic syncretism is to be found in the Telugu country, in Madavaram Darsi Taluq where a Hindu god was conceived in whom the features of Christ were clearly perceptible. This god has now disappeared, because the worshippers all became Christians in a mass conversion movement in the first decades of this century.

The god in question is called Yogi Pothuluri Virabramham. He must have been one of the many reformers who from time to time rise up in India influence thousands over several

generations, are already deified and worshipped during their lifetime, and even to a greater degree after their death, and are then forgotten. This Yoga's influence seems to have been deeper, more far-reaching, and purer in doctrine than many others.

In the Telugu villages where Virabramham was worshipped the story runs as follows:

In a carpenter's family, very devoted to the worship of Shiva, a son was born who took his place among the other children of the family. But when he had grown to be a sizable boy he saw a vision in the field where he was working which invited him to a certain shrine where he henceforth often held converse with the Deity.

Soon he was able to work miracles. One day when he was feeding the cattle he saw a man who had just died from snake bite. Virabramham, the carpenter's son, at once raised him from the dead.

On another occasion some of the villagers were bringing out a dead man to bury him. Virabramham approached the funeral procession and asked what they were doing. Upon being told, he said "No, the man is not dead. He is alive", and immediately the dead man rose, took his bier and walked away.

One day Virabramham was going on a journey. Rain came on and he stopped for a short time. After the rain was over it was discovered that no water had fallen near where he had stood.

Another day as Virabramham and his disciple were going to Kandipullayyapuram they met a widow who had lost a son, and Virabramham had compassion on her and restored her son to life. Many other such miracles are said to have been performed by him.

Virabramham has inspired thousands of low caste people in Telengana with a hope which in some of its features resembles the millennial hope in the mind of the Christian who looks forward to a speedy second coming of the Lord.

This Yoga taught that God is a pure spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit. He taught that there is one God, and that he has created all things, and pervades all things. In the book in which his disciples preserved much of his teachings, he calls upon the "multitude" to turn from wickedness and to foster the spirit of truth and sincerity. "Those who say 'Ram! Ram!' will fall

away", he used to say, "because it is lip-service, and not of the spirit." He taught them to look forward to a coming incarnation of God. This expectation of a re-incarnation of the Deity was *in fact the central thought in his teaching*; and he has so filled the minds of his followers with this hope that they looked for its fulfilment in the immediate future.

Virabramham's sect was called Rajayogi. His followers belonged mainly to the lower castes. His intimate disciples called *gurus* practised an hour of meditation every day, in which they used to close their eyes, and press their fingers over ears and nostrils to shut out completely the objects of sense. In this manner they tried to perceive the great, all-pervading spirit of God.

Virabramham sent his *gurus* through the villages, visiting the Rajayogis. They were offered free hospitality on their visits, and were well entertained. Those of low caste did not disdain fowl's meat and liquor (*sarai*).

When Virabramham felt death approaching — he died around *the middle of the nineteenth century — he entered his grave alive, after the manner of the Yogis, and ordered the door to be closed. It is said that his chief disciple, Sidappa, who had been absent at the time of his master's death, came later to the grave and called aloud to his master, for he had not given him his final initiation. With an invisible hand, the words which his master had to say were written on his tongue. He departed, and from then onwards Sidappa directed his preaching mainly against caste; and prophesied, in the name of his master, that in the day when God again became incarnate, caste would vanish and all men would be equal.

But others relate that three days after Virabramham had died he arose from the grave, and appeared to his disciples and others. He announced to them a coming judgement, punishments and rewards, and promised to come again in the guise of a beggar. Then he left them and went up to heaven.

The disciples of Virabramham made an image of him, and its worship spread to several villages. The worship was held on Fridays and anyone, irrespective of caste, could officiate. The worship consisted of prayers and hymn singing, much after the fashion of the Christian (Protestant) liturgy. Various offerings

were placed before the idol, but none of the offerings were of blood

It is not difficult to trace the origin of this cult. It is simply an adaptation of the Christian beliefs which the founder had heard

After the death of Virabramham the *gurus* who kept his memory and message alive and conducted his worship, gradually degenerated into ignorant parasites who had no spiritual consolation for the down trodden villagers of Telengana except the promise of the founder that he would return

When towards the end of the last century mass conversions took place to Christianity in this part of India many Rajayogis embraced the *Christian faith finding fulfilment of their yearning for a Messiah in Jesus Christ*

In 1909 the idol of Virabramham in Madavaram was handed over by its priest to Bishop Elmore and the temple of the god was converted into a Christian school. The image is now in the museum of the Rochester Theological Seminary

The 'revolutionary' element in this messianic movement is apparently lacking. It was long suppressed by the abject economic and social position of the low caste followers of Virabramham. They simply lacked the courage to stand up to their convictions in the absence of any powerful agency to give them support. Their leader Virabramham and the *gurus* his assistants were few and powerless in the face of the strongly entrenched system of oppression and they were moreover too unworldly and ascetically minded to object and revolt against it

As soon as the followers of Virabramham joined the Christian Church they began to revolt against the economic exploitation and social oppression by their masters and landlords. Many instances of such revolts are known. Backed by the *Dora* (the white missionary, a friend and countryman of the powerful colonial officers) the Madigas and other low castes had the courage to refuse work on Sundays, to refuse to participate in Hindu worship as drummers and musicians or pay contributions to Hindu sacrifices and they began to object strongly to the traditional treatment they suffered as untouchables and outcastes. They found consolation in a close association with the (white) missionaries who on account of their colour and position were regarded as superior beings

The new Christian converts also revolted against certain traditional laws and regulations of their own caste communities and set themselves apart from their non Christian caste fellows. They suffered fierce persecutions at the hands of high caste Hindus and village headmen and from their own caste fellows and relatives, often with heroic patience and a great passive stubbornness but with the conviction of a speedy supernatural revenge to follow, which in some instances actually came true. Their persecutors either suffered misfortune or fell sick or even died suddenly. This was invariably interpreted as a divine punishment, and it was often even accepted as such by the oppressors themselves.

No doubt the mass movement to Christianity that set in was supported by this revolutionary sentiment of which the Christian missionaries were probably quite unaware.

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3 THE FAILURE OF A MESSIANIC MOVEMENT IN COORG

In the first decades of the nineteenth century the people of Coorg were in great distress. Linga Raja, the regent for the Coorg Rani, still under age, had reduced the population to a state of abject slavery by a rigid system of terror of which no hint was allowed to be heard outside the country. This is at least the allegation of the English historians of the time.

Linga Raja died in 1820. His son Vira Raja succeeded him. The new regent was judged by the British to be worse than his father. It is alleged that with the intention of assuming the throne for himself he had the young Rani murdered, as well as many other relatives of the former Raja. He also planned a rebellion against the British overlords when he saw that they would not approve of his ambitions.⁴

In the quarrel about the succession to the throne of Coorg there appeared in 1833 a pretender named Virappa who was given out to be the only member of the former Raja's family who

⁴ Present local historians claim that the two regents, father and son, were wrongly accused by the contemporary British officers. The Rani was not murdered but died of cholera. The regents were no tyrants.

had escaped the general massacre (or epidemic?) in 1820. As the only survivor of the royal family he claimed the right of succession. He promised the Coorgis relief from the oppression of the regent if they accepted him as Raja.

The pretender was forestalled by the British who simply annexed Coorg in 1834. Virappa's claim was not accepted by the British. A British force marched against the regent, deposed him and sent him into exile, first to Vellore, then to Benares.

Virappa did not, however, give up his ambitions so easily. He assumed the guise of a *sannyasi* and called himself Aparampara Swamy. His intention was obviously to mislead the British under the anonymity of a religious mendicant and he hoped at the same time as a religious leader to gain a larger following among the Coorgis. His object was to drive out the British, to assume royal power in Coorg and to establish a Hindu dynasty instead of the foreign domination.

Virappa's chance came in 1837. In this year the Gaudas of Mysore State, who live in the western slopes of the Ghats and resemble the Coorgis in many of their habits, rose against the British administration. The reason for their rebellion was that they were now obliged by the British to pay their taxes in cash whereas in the past they had paid them always in kind. This change of payment, so they claimed, drove them into the hands of the moneylenders, and they revolted. They approached the Coorgis and asked them to join the rebellion. Virappa, *alias* Aparampara Swamy, accepted with alacrity this opportunity for an open revolt against the British whom he hated because they had rejected his claims.

He gave out that a great prince of the Haleri House was about to take possession of his inheritance and that he would then set everything right. Aparampara Swamy's proclamation to the people of Mangalore shows that his primary object was to drive the British from the country. It reveals his arrogance and the immense over-estimation of his own power and resources. Among other things he said the following in his proclamation: "The troops of the Swamy having arrived to fight a battle against the English, you are directed to join them, taking up arms and other weapons which you may possess. If you act otherwise the whole of your family will be beheaded. There is a force consisting of

twelve lakhs (i.e., 1,200,000) of troops expected and consequently you will send instant messages about your readiness to join the Swamy's forces; otherwise, you will suffer the consequences. If you all join, you will be protected."

But the Coorgis, after the allegedly oppressive and arbitrary government of their former rulers, were apparently well satisfied with the British administration and denied Virappa their following. The pretender was soon arrested for sedition by the British and detained in jail at Bangalore where he died in 1870.

After Aparampara's arrest the Gaudas managed to replace him by another religious leader, Kalyana Swamy, who also attempted to rally the insurgents around himself by announcing that he was Nanjundappa, the second son of Appaji Arasu, the youngest brother of Vira Raja the Elder. But when Kalyana Swamy toured southern Coorg with the purpose of inducing the people to revolt against the British he was sorely disappointed; he failed to get any appreciable following.

Soon the police were after Kalyana Swamy and he was forced to go into hiding. Some people gave him shelter, but in Coorg nobody was prepared to take up arms against the British. Finally, Kalyana Swamy was caught by the police at Baithur though he had disguised himself. He was imprisoned at Mysore.

The Gaudas, who were still bent on revolt, set up a young man, Puttabasappa, and pretended that he was Kalyana Swamy, since it was not known that the Swamy had been arrested. Puttabasappa was a young man full of drive, courage and determination. He went to Bellara and with his band of followers looted the treasury. His success attracted a number of new followers, but only of such people as were ignorant of the fact that the true Kalyana Swamy was under arrest and that a fake Swamy was playing his part. With the help of the Gaudas of South Kanara Puttabasappa was able to raid more places and loot the treasuries.

In order to arouse the enthusiasm of the people for their cause, Puttabasappa and his followers appealed to them to rise on behalf of their exiled king and expel the British usurpers. They promised remission of land revenue for three years if they regained their independence. They also gave out that the exiled Vira Raja had returned and would soon show himself to his faithful subjects. With such appeals and proclamations Puttabasappa secured some

more followers in North Coorg, but few Coorgis joined him in the south

Puttabasappa now moved with his small army towards Puttur, while the British collected troops against the insurgents in South Coorg. The Collector of Mangalore went with a small force to South Kanara when he heard of the insurrection of the Gaudas, but returned to Mangalore after being informed that Puttabasappa was at Puttur. There he looted the treasury, marched to Bantwal where he also appropriated all the cash in the treasury. On his subsequent march to Mangalore people joined him in large numbers. The town was deserted when he arrived there, the Britishers having fled to the sea coast, expecting help from a passing ship. Puttabasappa entered Mangalore and broke open the prison.

This success gave the revolutionary movement a new impetus and many more joined it. But with the help of some prominent Coorgis the British were able to keep the people of southern Coorg peaceful, while they collected a force large enough to meet the insurgents in Kanara and northern Coorg. When they saw that the government forces were getting the upper hand the insurgents defected in great numbers. Finally, Puttabasappa was caught by the British with some of his chief followers. He was tried, and sentenced to be hanged at Mangalore. His associates received long jail sentences. The Coorgis who had actively opposed the rising and assisted the British in quelling it received ample rewards.

Thus ended a rebellion which had in itself many features of a messianic movement. It came to nought because under British rule the social and economic situation had quickly improved in Coorg and thus the basis for a messianic movement had been removed.

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CHAPTER 10

MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS IN KERALA

I AMONG THE EZHAVAS

UNTIL a few decades ago, the Ezhavas — traditional toddy tappers — were one of the most backward castes in Kerala. Though very numerous — in 1901 they numbered 3 700,000 individuals — they were from ancient times a down trodden people despised by the caste Hindus, and suffering the most grievous social disabilities such as untouchability, unsociality, denial of education, disability of employment in public service of owning land, etc. They were exploited economically in various ways by the upper classes. In Kerala caste rules and restrictions in the past had been observed more rigidly and strictly than elsewhere. The rules regarding pollution by touch or proximity were especially strictly enforced.

Today the Ezhavas are one of the more important communities in Kerala strong enough to control even government policies. They counted at one time in their ranks the Chief Minister of the State, the Chief Justice, and a number of civil servants in all grades of the service in the State and Central Governments. This almost incredible progress of the Ezhavas was effected in the last decades of the nineteenth century by the vision and untiring efforts of one man who for his merits now receives almost divine veneration. Of course he did not achieve the uplift of his caste single handed, but with the active help of many enlightened and devoted helpers, but it is no mean achievement that he was able to raise so much sympathy and help in his own community.

Nanu Asan — that was his name — was born in 1854 or 1856 of poor Ezhava parents in a place called Chempazhanthi five miles north of Trivandrum. Though his parents could ill afford him any education the boy managed to master the rudiments of Sanskrit and even to learn the traditional Indian (Ayurvedic) medicine. As a youth he is said to have received visions of Balakrishna (god Krishna as a boy). An extreme sensitiveness

to the suffering of men and of animals marked him out from all his companions

After leaving school Nanu Asan started on a teaching career. However, he felt the insistent call to a higher religious life. During this time he had a great devotion to god Subramanya (Kartikeya a son of Shiva), the god of war. He used to write devotional verses in profusion addressed to this deity.

The struggle against his better nature ended when in his mid twenties Nanu Asan took leave of home and relatives to embrace the religious life. For years no one saw him or heard anything of him, his renunciation of the world was complete. It seems that he received his initiation into yoga from one Ayyavu a Tamilan. It was then that he adopted the monastic name of Sri Narayana Guru, by which name he became famous. After his initiation the young monk spent several years in the practice of yoga in the Marutwan Hills living in friendly company with wild animals in caves and rock shelters. After that he used to wander as a mendicant first among the fisherfolk of the coast, then among Christians and Muslims. It is said that on his wanderings he once met a Yogini (woman ascetic) who blessed him and advised him to devote his life to the ministry of the poor. That was perhaps the turning point of his career.

The young monk settled down at Aruvippuram in beautiful sylvan surroundings near the river Neyyar. Slowly the fame of the Yogi radiating light love and peace, spread around the country. During this time his personal convictions about Hindu religion were being formed. He believed in the existence of God the unity of mankind and the natural goodness of man. Though a pantheist Sri Narayan Guru did not join any of the numerous sects of Hinduism current in Kerala in his time. He was not very speculatively inclined and rather puritanical in character, and theoretical religion was to him nothing but a curse, and it was only the application of religion in daily conduct and life that counted.

Narayan Guru was essentially a revolutionary. He revolted especially against the paramount predominance of the Brahmans in all walks of life. The young monk aspired to a new social order based on the principles of equality and justice. He gave the religious reform movement which at that time began to rise

in various circles of Hindu society, a strongly social bias and a practical turn. Above all the Swami campaigned for the mitigation of the rigid caste restrictions, if not for their complete abolition.

As could naturally be expected, the work of Narayana Guru for the economic and social improvement of his caste was looked upon with acute *disfavour* by the members of the higher castes, and they threw many obstructions in his way. But the persistent and selfless efforts of the monk, coupled with his great organizing capacity, enabled him and his disciples to overcome all initial difficulties and pave the way for the uplift of the Ezhavas.

Being well aware of the strong hold which religion had over his caste fellows and at the same time anxious to break the authority of the Brahmins over them, the Swami started the building and consecrating of many shrines in various parts of Kerala. These were set up for the religious requirements of the Ezhavas, but he insisted that they should also be open to other low castes, such as Pulayars and Parayas to whom the caste Hindus denied entrance into their temples. To the Brahmins and other high caste Hindus who questioned the right of an Ezhava to consecrate temples the Swami gave the famous reply that he was consecrating the temples "not to the Brahmin Shiva, but to the Ezhavan Shiva".

The first of the temples thus consecrated by Sri Narayan Guru was erected in 1888 at Aruvippuram itself. It still attracts many pilgrims annually for the feast of Shivarathri in the month of February. Another celebrated shrine—among many others—was consecrated by the Swami in 1911 at Sarada. It has ever since been a great pilgrimage centre. Sri Narayana Guru installed Ezhavas as priests in the temples instead of Brahmins.

In order to bring Ezhava standards of religious worship up to the demands of orthodox Hinduism in ritual purity, he imposed on his caste fellows abstention from the bloody Kali worship, from animal sacrifices, shamanism, witchcraft and other superstitious rites, which so far had been widely practised in the name of religion not only by the untouchable castes like the Pulayars and Parayas, but by the Ezhavas as well.

Wherever a new temple was erected, the Swami tried to build a Sanskrit school. He even encouraged western education for his Ezhavas. Among his disciples and followers he organized a

group of volunteer preachers to go from village to village disseminating his teachings on clean and pure living

True to Hinduism, Sri Narayana Guru tried to attract his most ardent disciples to a higher stage of religious life. However, it was only a year before his death that he was able to establish a congregation of monks, the Sri Narayana Guru Sanghom. It has now a number of branches within and outside Kerala. Any man of whatever sect and caste could become a member of the Sanghom after a probation of three years. In fact, a good number of Nairs have joined his Sanyasi order. Since Sri Narayana Guru died so soon after founding the Sanghom he was not able to give it a sound formation. Thus the members of the Sanghom are remarkable neither for their learning nor for their high spirituality. They have no definite religious beliefs, nor do they practise social work, but are content with a life of withdrawal from the world.

Having been born in the Ezhava community, the Swami suffered the many social indignities of an untouchable. This prompted him early to inaugurate social reforms. Throughout his life, he worked untiringly for the moral and social advancement of the Ezhavas but he also included in his uplift work the Pulayas and other backward castes of Kerala. In this endeavour the Swami was certainly inspired by Christian ideas for in his time social work was still unknown among the Hindus. This Christian influence is not surprising as the Swami had lived for some time among Christians. Moreover, the Ezhavas could see with their own eyes how the Christian missionaries worked for the social and economic improvement of their low caste converts. It is probable that the Swami received much inspiration for social work in his community as well from the example of the Ramakrishna Mission which had opened some ashrams in Kerala before his time.

First of all Sri Narayana Guru raised his powerful voice against the observance by the Ezhavas of the customary Brahmin rituals and ceremonies. Many such customs had been adopted by them from their masters and they were responsible for an enormous waste of money. For instance, the Swami preached against the performance of the so called Talikettu ceremony, a kind of preliminary marriage which takes place before a girl attains puberty in order to prepare her for polyandric unions. The Swami was

also against the so-called Tirandukalyanam, a feast celebrated on the occasion of the first menstruation of a girl, and against Pulikudi, a feast performed for a woman in the ninth month of her pregnancy.

The Swami, like so many other religious reformers, was of too puritanical a mind to allow a man the right to enjoy his religion. He was of the opinion that the first task of religion was rather to "improve" a man and to lead him to a nobler and more virtuous life. One of his famous sayings was: "Whatever one's religion may be, it is true as long as it makes the individual better." Evidently the Swami placed moral improvement first and held it more important than the worship of God.

For the purpose of the social advancement of his caste Sri Narayana Guru joined a powerful organization, the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, founded in 1903 by Dr. Palpu, another prominent Ezhava social worker. Its aims were the economic, political and educational improvement of the Ezhavas. This organization appointed Sri Narayana Guru its life president. From 1904 onwards annual sessions were held at Aruvippuram under the Swami's spiritual guidance.

The Swami included women in his social work and founded a special association for the education of women and girls and for the general improvement of their hard lot.

In 1904 Sri Narayana Guru set up permanent residence in the ancient town of Varkala, which the Hindus regard as a sacred place because it has an ancient temple dedicated to the god Janardana (Vishnu). It is called the Southern Varanasi (Benares). In beautiful surroundings at Varkala the Swami founded the Sivagiri *mutt*, a monastery, where he resided until his death. This change of residence was made necessary because the Swami had become the founder of so many organizations and the directing head of many activities.

Sri Narayana Guru was fortunate in having very capable friends and disciples who shared his ambitions and co-operated with him in the social advancement of his caste. Notable among them was Dr. Palpu, a high official in the Mysore State Government, and Kumaran Asan, the adopted son of the Swami, who later became a famous Malayalam poet and acted as the General Secretary of the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam.

Another close friend was T. K. Madhavan, a prominent leader of the Ezhavas, who gave the agitation a more political turn, associated it with the All India Satyagraha Movement of Gandhi and in 1936 after a long and hard fight achieved the opening of over two thousand State temples to the Harijans (untouchables). By cleverly using as a powerful political weapon the anti alcoholic movement, started by Sri Narayana Guru as a social reform T. K. Madhavan forced the government to make many concessions under the threat of an annual loss of Rs 700 000 excise income.

That the Swami could make so many friends and life long followers was the result of his lovable selfless character. He often told his disciples that the happiest people in the world are not the selfish, but the selfless nor those who cherish soaring ambitions but those who love most. He often preached 'The greatest science man can study is the science of living with other men. There is no other thing so taxing and requiring so much wisdom, so much practice as the art of living together. There is no art that is finer than the art of being at peace with one's neighbours.'

The Swami always insisted on the imperative need for tolerance and goodwill between different communities. In fact in his later years he became increasingly broad minded and finally saw all humanity as one and laid great emphasis on the fact that there was only one caste one religion and one God. To him any religion and any caste was as good as any other and in his opinion it was only essential for a religion to improve the character of men and women.

It is not surprising therefore that Sri Narayana Guru's influence was not confined to the members of the Ezhava caste. Among his Sanyasi disciples were many Nairs but he also accepted disciples from castes lower than the Ezhavas. In his endeavour to promote inter caste relations he advocated inter dining and inter marriage between the various castes as a means of breaking down barriers of caste and evolving a casteless classless society.

In spite of his revolutionary ideas and activities and his fight against the Brahmins Sri Narayana Guru always remained a staunch Hindu and did his utmost to stem the tide of conversion towards Christianity and dissuaded his caste fellows most effectively

organization tends to become an exclusively Ezhava union, and so the union of all castes and creeds which the Swami was promoting during the last years of his life is far from being realized. Besides even within the ranks of the Ezhavas there exist serious cleavages based on regionalism and particularism. The *Tiyas* of former British Malabar, for instance, and the Ezhavas of the former Cochin State go their own ways in many important caste issues and refuse to co-operate with the Ezhavas of the former Travancore State. The result is that at present other untouchable castes like the Pulayars and Parayas are losing confidence in the Yogam and are trying to form their own separate unions. This would not have been possible while the Swami was alive.

LITERATURE A Sreedhara Menon *Kerala District Gazetteers Travancore* Trivandrum 1962 pp 276-79, G Velparampl 'The Ezhavas in Kerala' *Caritas Always* 1958 pp 23-34 *Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam Golden Jubilee Souvenir* Qilon 1953 A Ayyappan *Sri Narayana Guru and Universal Religion* See *Narayana Guru Centenary Souvenir* Qulon 1954 pp 33-34

2 AMONG THE NAIRS

The Nairs in Kerala — numbering over one and a half million according to the Census of 1951 — can scarcely be called a backward community though they are generally classed as Sudras (fourth and lowest in rank of the caste system of Hinduism). They were the rulers of Kerala in early times but by the Middle Ages they had already become subservient to the Nampoodiri Brahmins into whose hands most of the land had gone in the course of time. Thus the Nairs often became tenants and vassals of the Nampoodiri Brahmins.

The free mingling of the sexes — due to mother right and polyandry, prevalent in the past — and their expensive obligations on occasions of feasts and ceremonies impoverished them. In addition they were divided by internal dissensions. On the arrival of the British their military power was crushed and their political influence greatly diminished. They lacked leadership because the extreme individualism of the Nairs prevented any organization for concerted action.

In the nineteenth century the Nair community was slowly degenerating. Economically they had suffered severe setbacks. Though more than seventy five per cent of them owned land their

holdings were small and they were satisfied with only a little cultivation. As they felt it was below their dignity to do manual work themselves, they depended for the cultivation of their fields on their sub-tenants. For reasons of prestige few Nairs took an active part in industry, trade or commerce, and so they were by-passed by the modern economic developments which brought so much wealth to the more progressive classes of India.

In this situation the whole Nair caste in Kerala was in danger of being reduced to a backward community. Fortunately some very gifted community leaders arose at this time who guided the Nair caste back into prominence. Towards the end of the nineteenth century even the Hindu faith had begun to lose its grip on large sections of the population. The rigours of the caste system, and other social disabilities which held down large sections of the Hindu population in semi-slavery had led to mass conversions of large numbers to other faiths, particularly to Christianity.

Among the Nairs it was Chattampi Swamikal who roused them from stagnation and apathy. By initiating certain religious and social reforms among his community he rendered great service to the cause of Hindu religion and society, mainly through his social and humanitarian work. At the same time he was intensely religious and rebellious against Brahminical predominance.

Kunjan Pillai (which was the original name of Chattampi Swamikal before he became a monk), was born in 1854 at Kollur, four miles to the north of Travandrum city. His father was a Brahmin, his mother was a Nair by caste. According to the mother-right system prevalent in those times in Kerala Kunjan Pillai became a Nair, taking his mother's caste.

Kunjan Pillai's family was so poor that though his relatives were early aware of the extraordinary talents of the child, they could not afford to give him a special education. Owing to the great poverty of his relatives Kunjan had to contribute to the family income at a very early age by collecting flowers in the neighbouring hilly places for the Brahmin ladies who needed them for the temple service. He also collected vegetables. He had no means for a proper schooling but he learned to read and write in Malayalam and Tamil from boys of his own age who attended a school nearby. His memory was so prodigious that he

learned Sanskrit simply by overhearing what was taught in the classes conducted in a Brahmin house. The teacher one day discovered the little eavesdropper and made a test of his learning, to his surprise he discovered that the boy had mastered all that he had been taught in class, he consequently allowed Kunjan to attend the class without taking any fee from him.

Kunjan showed such remarkable talents for learning that at the age of sixteen he was taken to the school of Raman Pillai in Pella. This Raman Pillai was a famous teacher in southern Kerala and the education which he imparted to his pupils was not merely intellectual but practical and adapted to the talents of the students. Raman Pillai soon appointed Kunjan monitor (*chattampi*) of his pupils. It was then that Kunjan acquired the name Chattampi by which he was known ever afterwards. The youth was highly appreciated by all not only for his wonderful capacity for acquiring knowledge, but for his remarkable talents in teaching.

It was noticed in those days that Chattampi frequently absented himself from the school at night. The pupils soon found out that Chattampi was visiting a nearby Bhadrakali temple where he sat for hours lost in meditation. The teacher was highly pleased about his monitor's love for the Devi and the pupils respected him the more for it.

At this time caste consciousness was very strong in Kerala. It was unthinkable, for instance, that a Nair would go to an Ezhava family and dine with them. Chattampi, however, was convinced that all distinctions of caste and class were man made and against the divine law. To him the basic equality of all men was clearly taught in the sacred scriptures of Hinduism. He carried his revolutionary convictions into practice by sharing food with his Ezhava friends and even staying in their houses. The Nair families of Travandrum were highly scandalized by this association of Chattampi with low caste people. Even his teacher was displeased with him.

Chattampi's ambition was "know everything, learn every thing." His sharp intellect penetrated the most difficult subjects of every science. His memory was so prodigious that he never forgot anything he had learned. Love for silence, abstention from violence, great affection for all living beings and a deep interest for everything were the characteristics of his nature.

Chattampi was an adept in sports as well. He was quite proficient in Indian music and mastered without a teacher all the *mudras* of Kathakali. He became an accomplished painter.

But his mind was restless in spite of all his achievements. He was searching for a deeper meaning of his life. For this reason he began to read the *Ramayanam* and the *Mahabharatam* and to study the Advaita doctrine in the original texts. He decided that he needed the guidance of a *guru* (teacher) to introduce him into the mysteries of Hindu spirituality. They were too deep to be grasped without a spiritual guide. In his search for a *guru* he found a *sanyasi* (monk) in the yard of the temple at Kollloor. The *sanyasi* taught him a *mantra* (Balasubramanya mantra — a sacred formula) and went his way. After meditation on this *mantra* — replete with spiritual power — Chattampi felt his spirits rising and his vitality returning. He even began to cure diseases by anointing the sick with *bhasmas* (sacred ashes) and to exorcise the possessed. He wanted to take up the life of a *sanyasi*, however, the debts he had incurred and the obligation of supporting his mother prevented him from it.

Kunjan found it difficult to earn a living. He began to work as a carrier of bricks and mud for building construction, which enabled him to support his mother, but soon he found this manual work too heavy and had to give it up. He returned home and in 1875, at the age of twenty-one, secured a job in the Registrar's office at Neyyattinkara.

Nor did this job satisfy him. He returned to Trivandrum and got work as a government accountant. Though his poverty was extreme he would not accept a rise of salary, as he wanted no earthly goods for himself.

Soon he gave up this job also and joined an association, called Gnanaprajagaram, which gave asylum to seekers of wisdom and students of religion. Chattampi studied *joga* with the help of one Thaikattu Ayyavu, at that time manager of the Residency at Trivandrum. He also studied English books on philosophy with the help of his young friends. But he felt a special attraction for the study of Tamil and acquired a good knowledge of the language. While at Gnanaprajagaram he studied the ancient works on the Vedanta written in Tamil.

His love for Dravidian culture and spirituality increased so

much that he decided to go to Tamilnad for further studies. He stayed at Valluvakkurichu with his new *guru*, Subbajadapadikal who guided him in his studies of the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, the *Vedanta* etc. After he had learned all that his *guru* knew and even surpassed him in depth of understanding Chattampi returned to Kerala where he continued his studies of philosophy and other sciences.

This time he acquired a personal guide for his spiritual needs. While attending a banquet he observed an old man sharing with the dogs the crumbs on the leaves thrown away after dinner. The dogs did not fight among themselves as usual when this saintly old man distributed the crumbs among them. Chattampi found this startling and followed the old man into the jungle. Here the old man disappeared suddenly. Chattampi was so shocked that he fainted. He woke up in the arms of the old man whose face shone resplendent like the sun. In that moment Chattampi received his spiritual illumination and he gave himself up to the service of the deity. He served his *guru* till he died. Then he wandered as a *sanyasi* through the whole south of India and studied the Koran and the Bible. He led a life of great simplicity, and was a friend of the poor and needy, of children and of the wild animals in the forest. He never again entered the house of his own family.

Soon the fame of his sanctity spread throughout Kerala and he was reputed to have worked a number of miracles. Several times he was bitten by poisonous snakes but they could not harm him. He is said to have floated in the air during meditation and to have calmed a torrential rain storm long enough to allow the cremation of a friend who had died. He made friends with ferocious tigers and other wild animals. He saved the lives of himself and his companions when travelling in a canoe on a flooded river after the rowers had lost control of the boat. He also cured many diseases that were supposed to be incurable. In short the life of Chattampi Swamikal was full of strange events.

Thus Chattampi Swamikal was able to play a very important role in the cultural, religious and social life of the Nair caste and of Kerala in general.

His remarkable activities in the religious field are manifold. He turned his full attention on the attempt to end the unbridled

supremacy of the Brahmans over the lower Hindu castes. In two books *Vedadhikaranirupanam* and *Prachinamalayalam* he proved with cogent arguments that the Brahmans are not the only people qualified to study the Vedas and philosophy, but that anyone could study them.

He worked hard to eliminate the many dissensions between the various religious groups and sects in Hindu Kerala and he tried to bring about a lasting reconciliation between the Nairs and Ezhavas who opposed each other bitterly. The Brahmans who were not interested in a union of Nairs with Ezhavas opposed him strongly and did their utmost to frustrate his attempts at reconciliation. But Swamikal intended to unite all Hindus of Kerala into a powerful movement which could hold its own in the face of Western and Christian influence.

He opposed the Christian claim that salvation could only be achieved through Christ, and in his book *Christumatharishedam* he maintained that salvation could be obtained in all religions and that all religions were equally good ways to God.

He imagined a world of one religion where lasting peace and harmony would exist, and where love and mutual understanding would create a paradise. He stressed a conviction that religious unity would greatly help in uniting India nationally.

On the other hand he emphasized the great achievements of Dravidian culture and insisted that the influence of Aryan culture had spoiled them. He preached 'We Malayalees really possess a culture which is independent and entirely different from that of the Aryans'. The restoration of the pure Dravidian culture, free from all Aryan accretions would be essential for a reform.

Against the onrush of Western ideas and ideals Chattampi Swamikal maintained that Hindu culture and religion were certainly equal to and in many aspects superior to Western culture. He preached vigorously against the drinking evil and firmly upheld the food taboos of Hinduism.

Through his religious and social activities he was able to inspire the members of his caste to work for its reform and to lead it to prosperity and political importance. Several organizations were founded with these aims in view. The Swami supported these efforts with all the authority which his religious character and intellectual prominence commanded and so was able to inaugurate

the restoration of his community to its pristine leading position in Kerala.

The Swami was fortunate in having a number of outstanding disciples to assist him in his religious and social activities. Most prominent among them were Nilakantha Swamikal who wrote many books in Sanskrit and Malayalam propagating the ideas of Chattampi Swamikal on spirituality, and Sri Tirthapada Swamikal who on the sixtieth birthday of his master founded a Hindu monastery in his honour. Sri Narayana Guru the famous Izhava saint and leader, was a contemporary of Chattampi Swamikal and there were ample opportunities for working in close co-operation with him in the cause of Hindu social and religious regeneration.

Chattampi Swamikal was generally regarded by the people of Kerala as an incarnation of god Brahma himself and received divine honours from them. It was in 1924 at his ashram at Panmana in Quilon district that Chattampi Swamikal passed away after a short illness.

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3 A MESSIAH OF THE PARAYAS

The observance of the traditional caste rules with all their severity, rigour and social exclusiveness was for long a peculiarity of Kerala. Although up to the present time the caste system has prevailed throughout India, no other region was ever more notorious for its rigorous enforcement than Kerala. People belonging to the Scheduled Castes (Untouchables) and the Backward Classes (Primitive Tribes — Adivasis) were not permitted to enter and worship in Hindu temples or to attend public schools and other public institutions, they were even prohibited from walking on the public highways adjoining temples and were not allowed to mix with caste Hindus. There were instances of educated men among the low castes having been denied even the opportunity to enter government service simply by reason of their low, polluting origin. No wonder that large numbers of such people

left the Hindu religion and embraced the Christian Faith or Islam which do not observe caste distinctions and freely admit members of low castes into their fold where they have the chance of rising to higher positions

It was obviously this ambition of improving his economic and social status that prompted a certain Parayā to join the Mar Thomite Church. In baptism he assumed the name Johannan Poykayil (John of Poykay). Dissatisfied with the Mar Thomite Church, he later joined the 'Brethren Church,' a Protestant sect of North-Irish origin.

Then in 1907 Poykayil Johannan founded his own Church at Iraviperur, a spot four miles east of Tiruvalla. He called his new Church *Pratyaksha Raksha Deva Sabha*—God's Church of Visible Salvation. His followers were people of the Christian Faith belonging to low castes such as the Pulayas and Parayas. He required his adherents to believe that he was a special messenger of God whom God had selected to lead them to salvation. Hoping for material and social benefits from him, about fifty thousand members of low castes from all over Kerala joined the new Church of Johannan whom they called their 'father'. Some of them even believed that Johannan was actually the incarnation of God the Father.

The members of this Church adopted more or less the same creed and practised the same rites of worship as were current in the 'Brethren Church'. Johannan taught, however, that the cross on which Christ had suffered should be not venerated but despised as the means of His death. Johannan was reputed to be a miracle worker and was known to fall easily into trance.

Before he could carry out any social and economic improvements for his followers, Johannan died. After his death, in 1938, his Church began to decline. Though his wife Njanamma took up the leadership, it did not flourish. Later she, and with her a majority of the sect's members, even reverted to the Hindu religion. However, a few thousands of Johannan's followers remained faithful, electing as their leader one Njalikuzhyil (John of Njalikuzhy). Their number is at present around five thousand.

A case is at issue at present in the district court of Kottayam between Njanamma and John Njalikuzhyil as to the rights of property belonging to the *Pratyaksha Raksha Deva Sabha*.

Njanamma firmly and emphatically asserts her right of inheritance maintaining that she is the legitimate successor of her husband Poykariyil Johannan, on the other hand Njalikuzhiyil Johannan denies her right over the property arguing that as she reverted to the Hindu religion she has no claim to property that belongs to the Sabha which is a Christian Church

Owing to this dispute the survival of the sect of Johannan is doubtful

LITERATURE TI Enchakkalody *Keralath le Cris tava Sabhakar* Truvalla 1962
p. 279

religion, and the present history of messianic movements give abundant instances of religious intolerance.²

The situation is aggravated by the fact that India, a nation of over four hundred and thirty-eight million — according to the Census of 1961 — has a tribal population of about twenty five million and a population of so called backward classes of well over sixty million. With one fifth of her population in a primitive or backward state of culture, India has definitely an acute administrative problem on hand which requires delicate handling. The messianic movements which this book has described have risen mainly among the primitive and backward population groups of India. Backward communities are therefore a dangerous and disturbing element in a state and the Indian government must take all the necessary steps to improve their living conditions and to assimilate them in the common national culture.

Thus the Indian government is already doing. It employs a host of official and semi-official social workers and reformers in the tribal areas and among the backward classes. But so far this government sponsored uplift work has not been very successful. It does not appear that the backward classes have noticeably benefited from the various welfare schemes and from the vast sums of money spent on these schemes.

A study of the messianic movements in India can perhaps provide us with valuable study material for a proper evaluation of the possibilities and difficulties which the Indian government has to face in bringing the under developed peoples and communities up to a higher level. These movements reveal certain important aspects of primitive or backward societies.

They show among other revealing facts that even backward tribes and castes can produce individuals endowed with exceptional mental and physical abilities which qualify them for the leadership in their respective communities. And if they were not handicapped by their lack of education and of a backing by political agencies they would even qualify for national leadership. Government reformers and social workers should take cognizance of this fact and deliberately and purposefully train as prospective leaders the likely individuals in any backward community. These could

² Cf. A. Rudra, *Myth of Tolerance*, Seminar, Delhi 1965, No. 67, pp. 22-25.

then be the most effective and valuable promoters of the reformatory aims of the Indian government because they are actually members of the community and not outsiders

For members of the backward classes often complain that these government sponsored reforms are forced upon them too much from without and that no efforts are made to secure their own co-operation. Not all backward people are averse to cultural change but they feel that reforms must come from their own communities and must be recognized as something necessary and beneficial, they should not be imposed on them by outsiders by officials who are often unsympathetic impatient and who act in a high handed manner. If the backward communities are to develop according to their own genius and along the lines of their own characteristic cultures these reforms can be achieved best by their own community leaders

Another reason why the government welfare schemes are so often ineffective is that they are carried out by undesirable agents. Members of exactly those castes and communities are employed for this type of work who in the past had exploited them so mercilessly taken away their land interfered with their customs and ridiculed their traditions. No wonder that reformers and social workers belonging to the same communities or castes are received with deep suspicion and that their well intentioned advice is not welcomed with eager and docile obedience. The passive resistance with which even practical and immediately beneficial improvements are received has often its cause in this old and deep resentment against the outsiders and oppressors — the *dikhu*

The Indian messianic movements also reveal in a striking way the great importance that backward peoples attach to social prestige. They are prepared to make great sacrifices in order to rise in social status. It is therefore advisable that the social workers and reformers sent out by the Indian government should carefully avoid the superior patronizing attitude which in former times the higher castes affected in dealings with low caste people and tribals. Such an attitude only antagonizes the people

Nor should government inspired economic and social uplift work be solely based on and motivated by economic considerations. The welfare agencies should realize that for the backward classes

There is no doubt whatever that Nehru gauged the situation correctly. He has used strong words, but he was fully justified in using them. Unfortunately, the difficulties for the government of a country the size of India will always be formidable, and tensions favourable to the growth of communal particularism will always exist. But the Government must keep an anxious watch to nip them in the bud and suppress them before they assume uncontrollable dimensions and create untold havoc and ruin.

Fortunately, India has embodied in her Constitution the spirit of secularism. In theory, every citizen of India, whatever his religion, is given full freedom to practise and propagate his faith, is granted equal opportunity with others for his advancement, is guaranteed his Fundamental Rights, and given free access to the courts of law for the safeguard and protection of these rights. This doctrine of secularism has often been misunderstood. Fanatics have often challenged its validity and have sought to undermine its efficacy. But it is essential for the inner peace of the country and for national prosperity that the various ethnic, social and religious groups should not exhibit any separatist tendencies or form themselves into separate communal organizations. They should rather join the mainstream of national life and should participate with all others in the great and glorious adventure of making India a strong, powerful and prosperous nation.¹

The particular communities may remember with justifiable pride that they have made a great contribution to Indian culture. But it is not only their own particular culture which they should cherish, what belongs to them is the whole of Indian culture and their legacy—does not commence with the rise of their own particular creed or community but goes back to the time when man appeared for the first time on Indian soil and settled down to make it his home, for himself and for his children's children.

However, the submersion of communal self interests in an all Indian national spirit is an ideal not easily obtainable. The widely propagated assertion that religious tolerance exists in India can safely be declared as a myth. India too has had its wars of

¹ Cf. M. C. Chagla, Union Education Minister, in his Convocation Address delivered on 16 January 1965 to Osmania University at Hyderabad.

that stimulate a new activity and give a new hope without upsetting the mental equilibrium. All reform movements inaugurated by the Indian government or semi-official welfare agencies introducing new ideas should take care not to be too strikingly foreign to the mentality and traditions of the people among whom they are propagated. They must strike a familiar chord in the hearts of the people even while bringing in a novel and disturbing element into the old melody.

An impressive reason for the popularity of the messianic movements is the confident way in which the spirit-guided leaders explain to those who seek help the nature and cause of their sufferings and show them the way to improve the situation. If success fails to follow this is explained as due to lack of confidence and obedience on the part of the followers or to the opposition of human or spiritual enemies. Generous assurance is given that all obstacles will presently be removed. Success is always just around the corner. This hope should be infused by the right type of propaganda into all prospective followers of a new reform movement. It must inspire those interested in a cause to exert themselves and only then will it stimulate unsuspected energies and abilities in the backward classes to be directed into the right channels for lasting reforms.

The Indian messianic movements further prove that it is a psychological mistake to demand no price for the material and spiritual benefits offered to the backward classes. Free gifts demoralize them. They do not value any goods which do not cost a stiff price. All leaders of messianic movements in India have demanded great and often heroic sacrifices from their followers not only for admission into their movements but also as a condition for staying on in them. And the aspirants and members of such movements always fulfilled these conditions cheerfully and proudly provided the right type of leadership was there to inspire their imagination and inflame their idealism. The deep psychological trends and the intensive emotions which in the past have been aroused by the messianic leaders often leading to a disastrous revolt and a final defeat should and could again be roused and directed towards the object of building a better world for the backward Indian classes.

In the past centuries many messianic movements arose in India which have brought much misery and suffering over the country. The reason for these uprisings was that large population groups lived in a state of emotional instability due to their generally unsatisfactory conditions of economic and social life due also to the impossibility of their continuing in the old traditional way of living as long as they were not prepared to accept the new principles and rules of life which a superior form of culture would impose on them. It cannot be said that the situation for the backward communities has improved considerably. On the contrary the pressure on them is now much heavier and the need for reforms is more urgent than ever. Only if the Indian government succeeds in bridging the gap between the various races and cultures by an enlightened and effective policy of acculturation and in completely assimilating the backward communities in the coming national culture will the emergence of dangerous future messianic movements be obviated. At present this danger is real and threatening.

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